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"My own reading journey"

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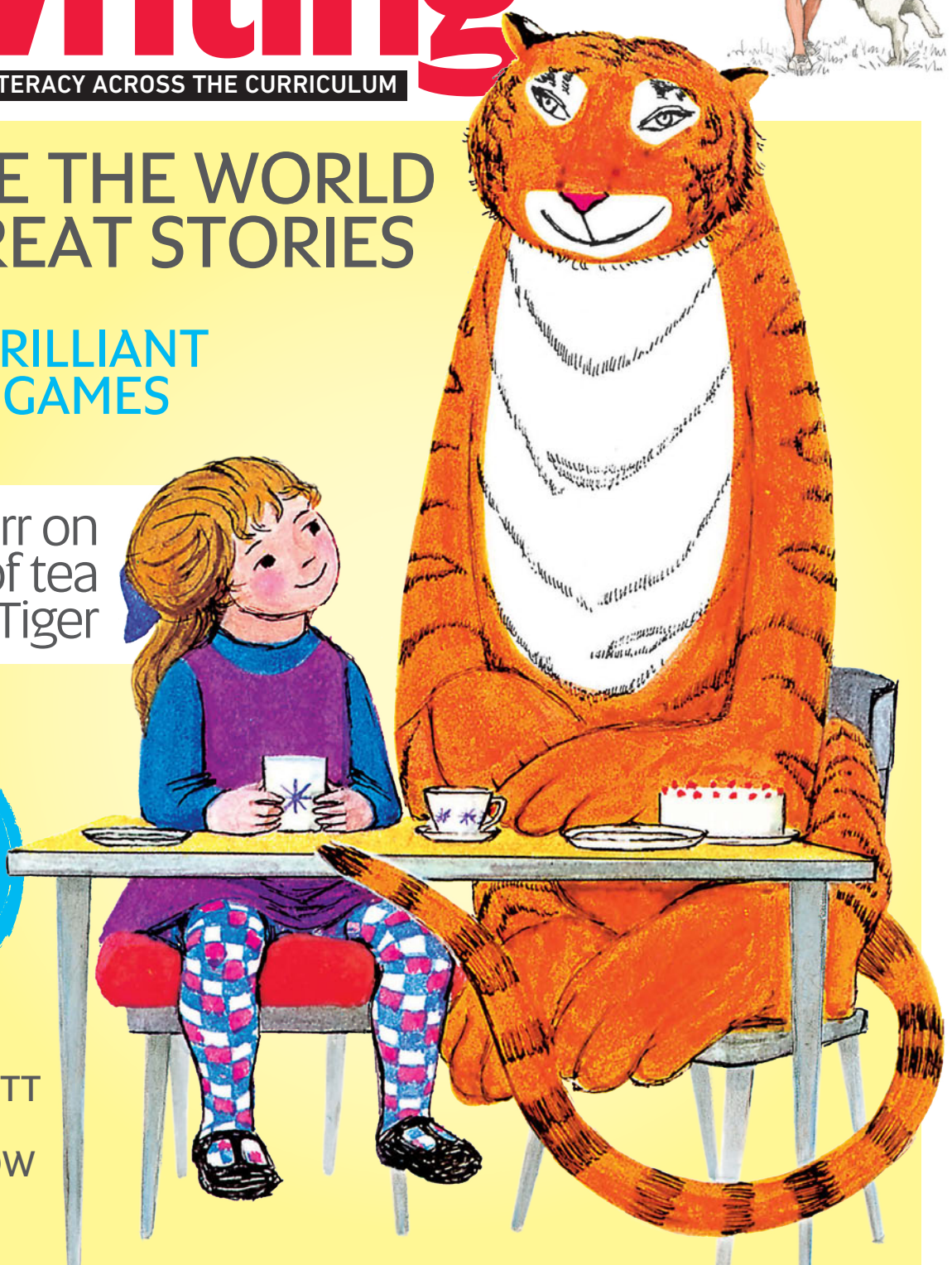

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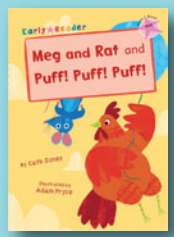

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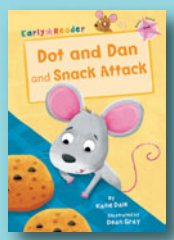

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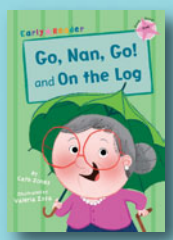

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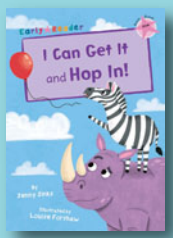

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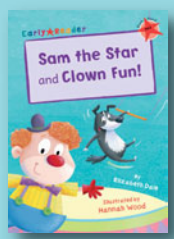

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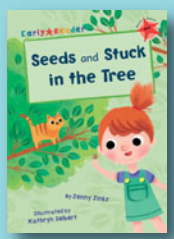

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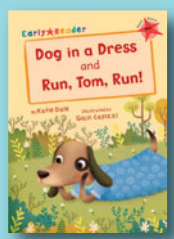

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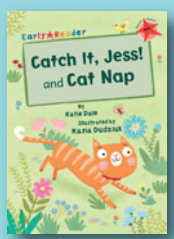

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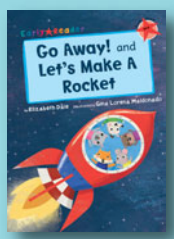

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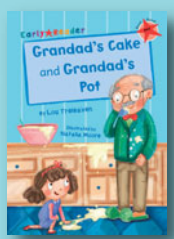

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- There is a guidance page for each story.

Maverick

Welcome...

When you share a book you love with the children you teach, something magical happens. No matter how many times you've read it before – no matter how well you think you know it – your pupils' thoughts, ideas and questions help you see it in a new way. And as they discover the narrative for the first time, you rediscover it, too.

But what are the most enjoyable books to teach? What are the stories that inspire new activities year upon year, and remain fresh and exciting for class after class? As part of this year's *Teach Primary Book Awards*, we asked teachers to tell us their favourites – and the result was a fascinating and surprisingly diverse list of hundreds of titles. From Shakespeare and Sendak to Rowling and Rosen, the range of authors who really hit the spot for educators and their pupils was impressively wide ranging; find out who came out on top – as well as our judges' verdicts on the very best reads for Reception, KS1 and KS2 – from page 66 of this issue.

Of course, if it's pedagogical, as well as literary, inspiration you're after, we've got plenty of that, too – including Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton on playful ways to teach grammar (p 76), Rachel Clarke's engaging spelling games (p.73), and a brilliantly simple resource to help youngsters structure their writing effectively from Rebecca Jakes that you'll find on page 19.

Here's to some fantastic learning adventures ahead!

Joe Carter & Helen Mulley, associate editors

"My own reading journey"

HELEN OXENBURY is acutely aware of the responsibility involved in illustrating stories for children.

"You can communicate across boundaries with the right image" p6

JEFF KINNEY thinks young people need to be allowed to enjoy reading on their own terms.

"Kids are great at sniffing out embedded messages – and rejecting them" p26

ANDY STANTON knows that adults and children alike love a really great villain.

"To have someone breaking the rules is thrilling" p38

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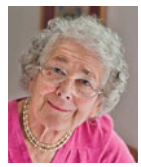
"My own reading journey"

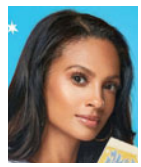
TOM FLETCHER credits JK Rowling with kick-starting his own writing career.

"Harry Potter changed my life" p42



JUDITH KERR insists her most famous book is definitely a tale about a tiger…

"There really is no subtext" p56



ALESHA DIXON deliberately created a superhero whom anyone can emulate.

"Everyone's looking for inspiration" p80

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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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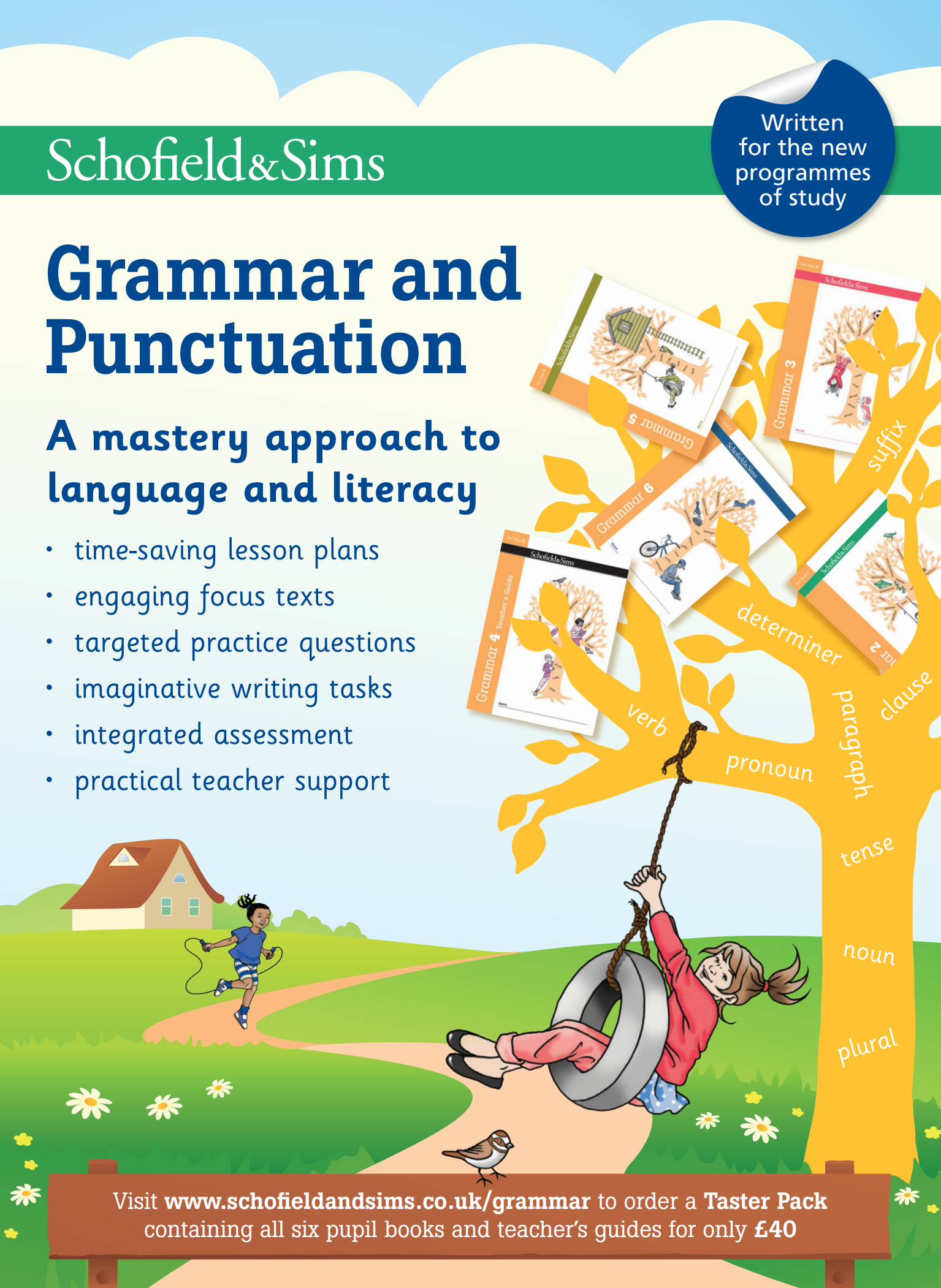

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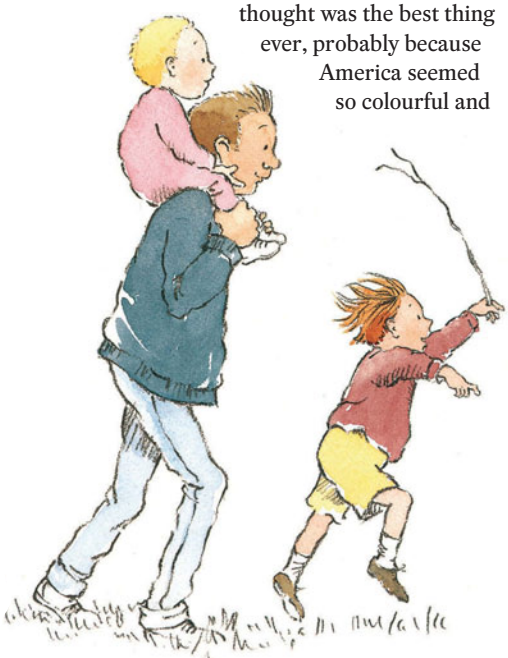
"You can cross boundaries with the right image"

Helen Oxenbury has illustrated some of the most popular children's books ever written – and it's not a responsibility she takes lightly...

I didn't grow up in a house that was filled with books; the reading material to which I had access as a child consisted mainly of magazines, comics, and because of lack of choice, the dreadful picture books my father would bring back from the library. Of these, it was definitely the comics that were my favourite – I remember being about four years old, waiting for my older brother to finish *The Beano* or *Dandy* so I could get my hands on it, absolutely desperate to know what the words in all those exciting speech bubbles said. The few books I did have, I treasured, even though they were awful (there was one full of shiny photographs of Shirley Temple in different outfits, which I thought was the best thing ever, probably because America seemed so colourful and glamourous compared with dreary, wartime England). But it was the comics that taught me to read.



When I was older, and reading independently, I devoured the usual fare of those times: books about ponies and horses, schoolgirl japes, and Enid Blyton's *Famous Five*. I also adored *The Good Master*, by Kate Seredy, which is a story that has so much to enjoy, including a splendidly feisty little girl as the main character, and marvellous illustrations of traditional Hungarian dress. I loved everything about it.

I wasn't one of those children constantly to be found in a corner, reading, though. Mine was much more of an outdoorsy upbringing – our garden backed onto a heath, and my brother and I were allowed to run wild there, which is what we did with pretty much all our free time. However, books still played a big part in my life, and I remember that as soon as I reached the end of a particularly good story, I'd flip back to the first page and start it all over again.

I always drew, and my parents encouraged me. I suppose my teachers thought I should take art because I wasn't much good at anything else – and then I went on to study at the Ipswich School of Art, the lure of which was as much to do with the kinds of people who went there (rather wild, I imagined and hoped, with mad clothes and listening to outrageous music) as with any particular career plan I might have had in mind. While I was there, I started to help out at the local theatre decorating sets and so on, which led me to a course in theatre design at Central School of Art, where I met John, my future husband.

I worked in television and the theatre for several years, but once John and I had got married and started a family, I realised that I wanted to find work that would enable me to stay with my children while they were young. John had already illustrated a couple of books, and I thought it would be really good if I could do something like that at home... the rest, as they say, is history!

Working with other people's words is not unlike doing the sets for theatre, as it turns out. You have a writer who creates scenes and characters – and it's your job not to 'overwrite' them, but rather, to complement and make the most of what

All illustrations: Helen Oxenbury

you are given by the author. You can have a little theme of your own running through the pages, but there are definite boundaries. I've written a couple of books of my own, and in some ways that's more satisfying, but in truth, both processes have challenges and rewards.

Children learn so much from picture books, and from an incredibly young age. Even tiny babies and toddlers take in an amazing amount from illustrations, because their brains are so fantastically sponge-like. Thinking about it like that makes you aware just how responsible a job it is, to illustrate a story. There are plenty of books out there where the artwork is all about the bright colours, and lots of weird things going on – and that's fine. For me, it's important that children are presented with pictures that say something, and that genuinely move them. You can communicate across boundaries of language and geography with the right image, and that's a very powerful thing.

To be awarded a BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award felt wonderful; and for my husband John to receive one at the same time was especially gratifying. I'm glad they gave us one each, too, rather than splitting a single award in half – it felt like an explicit acknowledgement that illustration is just as valued a contribution to children's publishing as writing, which is something I certainly believe. And besides, if we only had one between us, where would we display it?

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Delight and desire in reading

You can't force someone to love books, but you can tempt them to become a dedicated devourer of stories, says **Teresa Cremin**

Reading for pleasure is a legal requirement within the English NC, but surely pleasure cannot be mandated? We cannot *make* children find reading satisfying or demand they enjoy themselves! Instead we need to entice, tempt and invite them into the imaginative and engaging world of reading, share our own pleasures (and dissatisfactions) as readers, and work to enhance their delight and desire.

This statutory requirement stands in marked contrast to the National Literacy Strategy, in which, as Philip Pullman observed, there were more than 71 verbs to describe reading, and 'enjoy' was not one of them. The change in approach is, at least in part, a policy response to international studies (e.g. PIRLS) that reveal reading for pleasure – independent, choice-led reading – is a strong predictor of reading attainment (i.e. that the will influences the skill and vice versa).

We can build delight and desire, even with limited budgets. We can also create a legacy of past satisfactions for each child, satisfactions that power them forwards in the expectation of more: more information, more inspiration, more motivation.

Volition and agency are key. It must be reading children do for *themselves*, at their pace, in *their* own way and on subjects that connect to *their* interests and backgrounds, *their* worlds as well as others. Reading that is foist upon them, that is required, 'expected' and assessed frequently sidelines the reader. The former is reading for oneself, the latter reading for the system. Of course intrinsic and extrinsic motivation interact, but if our goal is to build readers for life, (not just to reach the expected standard), then we must afford more volition to the readers themselves.

Teachers as Readers, a partnership project between the Open University and UKLA identified four tenets of an effective reader-led, pleasure-focused pedagogy:

- reading aloud
- independent reading time
- booktalk, inside-text talk and book recommendations
- a social reading environment

Such practice is reliant upon teachers' subject knowledge of children's literature and other texts, and of their children's reading practices. It is enriched by adopting a Reading Teacher stance – being a teacher who reads and a reader who teaches – as this helps entice and involve children and builds reading communities.

To nurture children's delight and desire as readers within such pedagogy, why not try these text tempting activities:

Book blankets

Spread out all your books so every surface in the classroom is blanketed! Offer time for exploration, you might invite children to: find a book they remember enjoying; two books by an author they know; one book they'd probably never choose; another that looks intriguing; two books that are magical etc. Settling down with a friend and a chosen text or two, allow space to chat / re-visit / re-read / read aloud etc. Keep it informal, reader-led and social. This can enrich their later choices.

Book bursts

Select three fabulous books you've read (N.B. variety) and 'sell' them. You might read a favourite extract, show visuals, explain what sucked you in, voice your emotional response or showcase the author online. Children can do book 'pitches' too.

Book zips

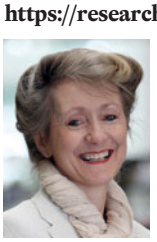
Explain to the class that some picture books are unusually protected by almost invisible 'Book Zips', but not to those with imagination! In groups, they choose one book they don't know to 'read', although they cannot open the padlock since if they do something drastic will happen to a fairy, etc! They can discuss and predict the setting, characters, plot, theme, vocabulary and share ideas informally. Books with limited / no blurbs work best – or you can place books in zipped plastic bags, until the fictional 'keys' arrive!

Books from yesteryear

Visit a younger class and borrow some boxes of books. Take time with your class allowing them to re-read or read aloud to each other as they revisit the delights of yesteryear. Maybe vote on favourites or create reader buddy time, with younger readers joining you for an impromptu relaxed book share.

It is not only our professional duty to make reading as irresistible as possible, it's a pleasure!

For more ideas, check out the examples of teachers' practice on the OU RfP site https://researchrichpedagogies.org



TERESA CREMIN
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READY, STEADY... Let's Read!

Prepping a book for your class can unlock many benefits for you and the children, says **Stephen Lockyer**...

Imagine being in a restaurant where, as soon as you've sat down, the waiter simply places the food in front of you – no browsing the menu, no ordering, no flair. Sounds fairly disappointing doesn't it? And yet we sometimes do exactly this with reading choices in school.

Ponder this question: how did you introduce the last fiction book you read or studied with your class? Was it a surprise to them, or did you warm them up first? 'Prepping' a book is a technique of introducing a text so that by the time you start reading the first few lines, the children are all bought into it completely.

Reading doyenne Marie Clay talks about 'debugging a book', in other words, taking all the challenges and obstacles which might stand in the way of the children enjoying it; prepping takes this a stage further – and here's how to do it:

1. Read it yourself

It is incredible to hear that some teachers don't read a new book completely before selecting it for their class. This is a must, as it can provide a real sense of continuity, pace and insight into the themes. If you are part of a year group where your reading list is given to you, take time to read the books before even considering teaching them. It sounds obvious, but you need to be more than one page ahead, especially for fiction.

As you read each book, jot down any ideas that come to mind for activities inspired by the text. Note down the broad themes, as well as any names, places or unfamiliar words with which your children might struggle – these will be introduced later.

It might also be worthwhile creating a family tree as you read. These can prove invaluable in explaining relationships and dynamics, and can support the children in their understanding of the book.

2. Find a prep object

If an image speaks a thousand words, then an object can project a thousand images. Seek out, beg, borrow or steal an item or items which can encapsulate a story. It might be something of significance later in the narrative, or something we discover early on that a key character has with them or discovers. Charity and antique shops, boot sales, social media sites and above all, teachers' lofts are all great places to look for prop objects.

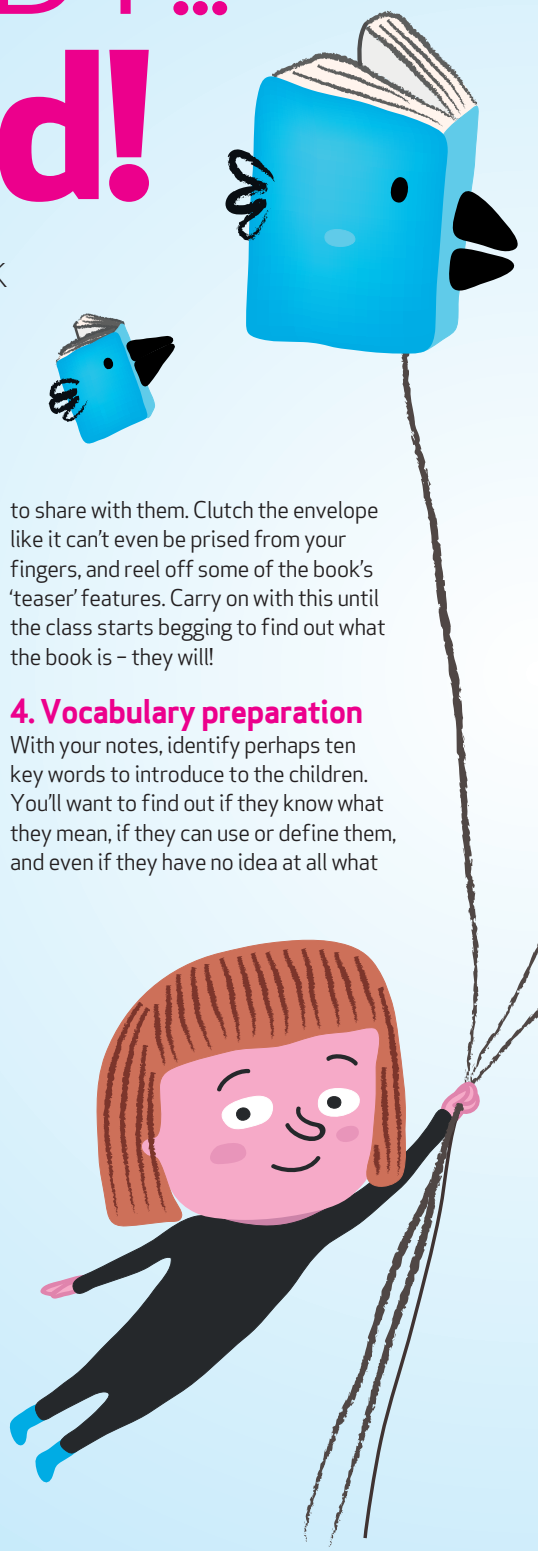
Leave the item or objects in the classroom – perhaps in the middle of the floor between desks – and don't refer to them at all if you can; this raises the intrigue! You may choose to leave something on your table, and act surprised about its appearance. If you have a suitable container, you could even put it in a flowerpot, box, envelope or old suitcase – this often has the most impact.

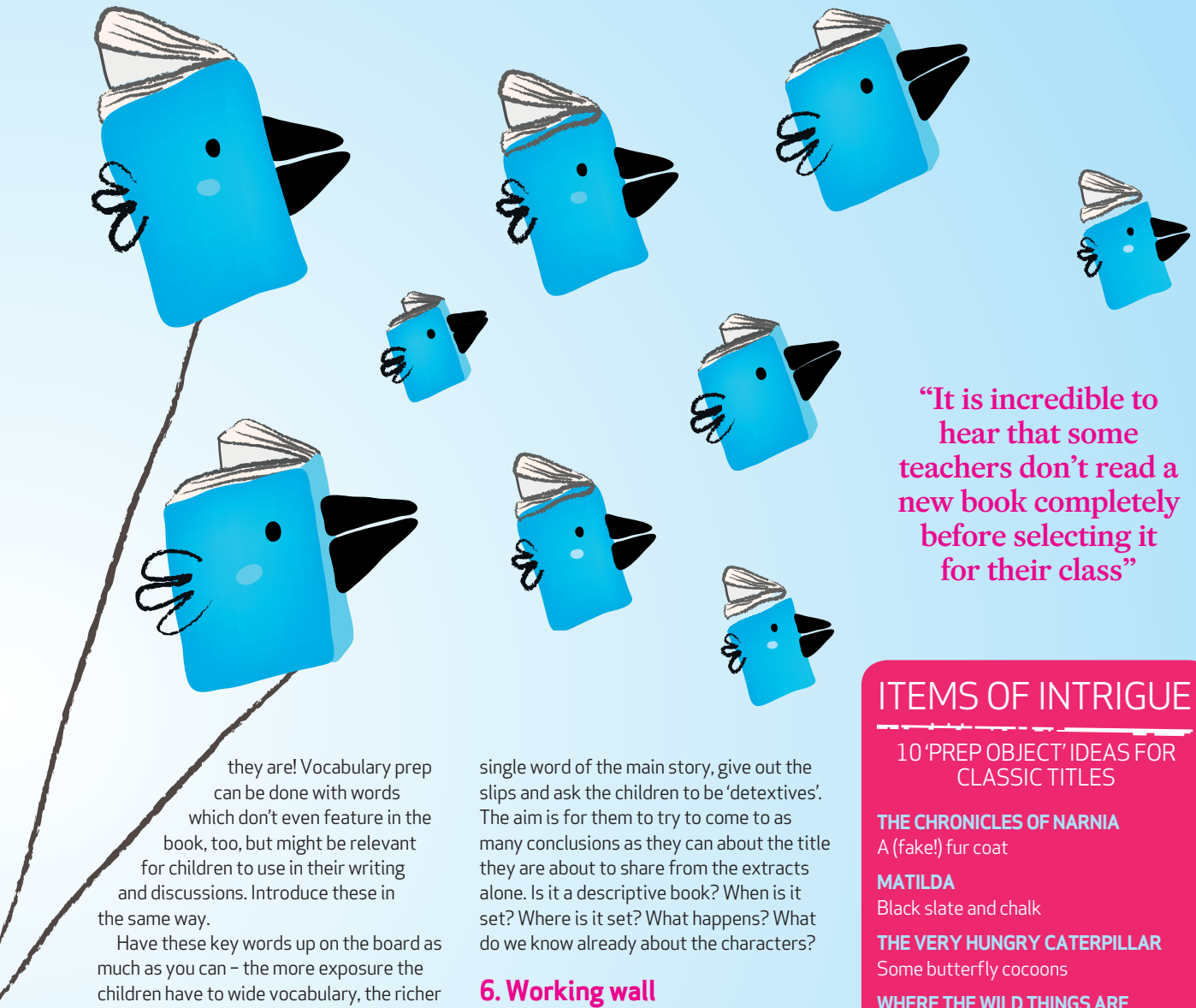
3. The clutch

This part of the introduction is carried out before you read a single word to the children, and ideally after their interest has been piqued by the 'prep object'. Put the book in a large, sealed envelope, have pupils sit down and tell them that you have found the best story, which you are desperate to share with them. Clutch the envelope like it can't even be prised from your fingers, and reel off some of the book's 'teaser' features. Carry on with this until the class starts begging to find out what the book is – they will!

4. Vocabulary preparation

With your notes, identify perhaps ten key words to introduce to the children. You'll want to find out if they know what they mean, if they can use or define them, and even if they have no idea at all what





> "It is incredible to hear that some teachers don't read a new book completely before selecting it for their class"

they are! Vocabulary prep can be done with words which don't even feature in the book, too, but might be relevant for children to use in their writing and discussions. Introduce these in the same way.

Have these key words up on the board as much as you can – the more exposure the children have to wide vocabulary, the richer their writing will be. If they are on permanent display, rather than shared temporarily via a screen, you will find the words start to permeate into other subjects too. And if they are used incorrectly, it gives you a brilliant opportunity to correct them with a small vocabulary teaching session.

5. The extract

The value of using extracts cannot be overestimated. This also requires some preparation, but pays dividends in terms of getting the children ready for understanding the writing style, characters, and theme of a book.

Find three or four suitable extracts – one or two paragraphs at most each – and print these out on slips of paper. Keep these in the book envelope, and before you read a single word of the main story, give out the slips and ask the children to be 'detextives'. The aim is for them to try to come to as many conclusions as they can about the title they are about to share from the extracts alone. Is it a descriptive book? When is it set? Where is it set? What happens? What do we know already about the characters?

6. Working wall

Find a spare board and back it, with a colour picture of the book in the centre. Encourage the children to fill this wall with their thoughts and ideas about it. They could create family trees, fiction maps, character sheets, extracts they like, best lines, fake film posters of the story, even Amazon reviews. Encouraging them each to bring "something for the working wall" will quickly fill it as well as inspiring others.

Teacher and author **STEPHEN LOCKYER** is the Enrichment Leader for the Lumen Learning Trust. He tweets as @mrlockyer

ITEMS OF INTRIGUE

10 'PREP OBJECT' IDEAS FOR CLASSIC TITLES

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA
A (fake!) fur coat

MATILDA
Black slate and chalk

THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR
Some butterfly cocoons

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
A bowl and striped pyjamas

STIG OF THE DUMP
A wooden catapult

THE IRON MAN
Giant footprints outside!

WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT
A picnic basket

ALICE IN WONDERLAND
A glass bottle with 'Drink Me' on an attached label

CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY
Some foil from a chocolate wrapper

GOODNIGHT MISTER TOM
A gas mask or ration book

10 BOOKS TO EXPLORE *the world*

Ask your class to become armchair adventurers, finding inspiration for art, dance and writing in many different cultures and continents, says **Carey Fluker-Hunt**

Foundation Stage

1

The Magic Paintbrush

BY JULIA DONALDSON AND JOEL STEWART (Macmillan)

What's the story?

An old man gives Shen a paintbrush and suddenly everything she draws is real. Word spreads, and soon the Emperor wants her to paint a money tree. But Shen knows the magic is only meant for the poor. How will she outwit the Emperor? Written in rhyming verse, this gentle fable is illustrated with delicate watercolours inspired by traditional Chinese art.

Thinking and talking

What would you paint if you had a magic paintbrush? Who would you help? What can we learn about long-ago China by sharing this book? What would you like to know about China today? How can you find out?

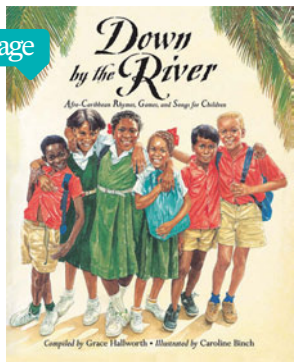
Try this...

- **Pretend you're holding a magic paintbrush like Shen. Paint imaginary pictures in the air, then add music to create a dance. Talk about what you painted and how it felt.**
- **Experiment with extra-large paintbrushes to see what kind of marks they make by painting water onto dry surfaces outdoors, then use diluted readymix on wallpaper. What would happen if your paintings came to life?**
- **Watch a Chinese dragon dance video, then make a dragon like Shen's using a box and fabric. Work together to make your dragon move. Give him a name and introduce him to your school!**

The Magic Paintbrush © Julian Donaldson & Joel Stewart, 2003, 2017, Macmillian Children's Books

Foundation Stage

2



Down by the River: Afro-Caribbean Rhymes, Games and Songs for Children

BY GRACE HALLWORTH AND CAROLINE BINCH (Frances Lincoln)

CHOOSE YOUR PARTNER

This way, Valery,
That way, Valery,
This way, Valery,
All day long.

Here comes the pretty one,
Just like the other one,
Here comes the pretty one,
All day long.

This way, Valery,
That way, Valery,
This way, Valery,
All day long.

"this book transports us to the warm heart of a Caribbean playtime"

"Written in rhyming verse, this gentle fable is illustrated with delicate watercolours inspired by traditional Chinese art."

What's the story?

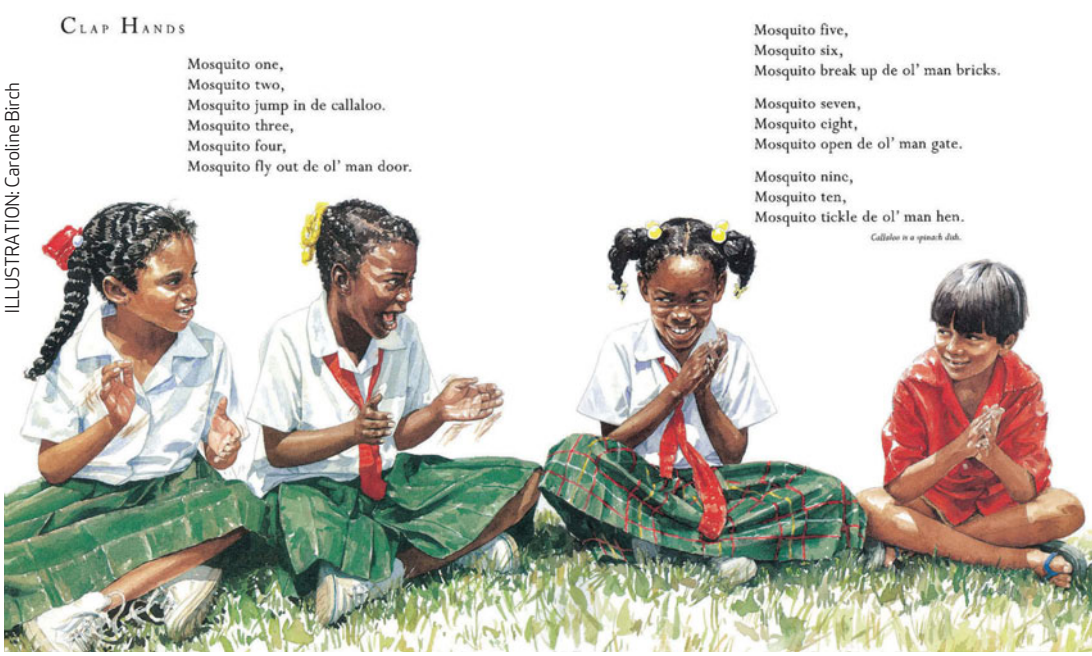
From lullabies and singing games to counting-out rhymes and chants, this book transports us to the warm heart of a Caribbean playtime.

Thinking and talking

Which is your favourite rhyme? Do any of these rhymes remind you of others you know? Talk about the games children are playing in these pictures. What do you play?

Try this...

- **Look at the spread showing children laughing in the rain. Imagine you're with them. What does the rain feel like? What's it like when it rains in the UK? Fill toy watering cans and take them outside to make it rain on different surfaces – try sheltering under an umbrella while somebody waters it! What does your rain sound like? Look like? Smell like? Collect words to describe this, then use to compose a class poem.**
- **Play traditional Caribbean games, or make up new games and invent chants or rhymes to accompany.**
- **Describe what you can see in the painting of the bay on the endpapers, then look inside the book to discover what it's like to live there. Explore your neighbourhood and take photos of the places you live, shop and play.**



CLAP HANDS

Mosquito one,
Mosquito two,
Mosquito jump in de callaloo.
Mosquito three,
Mosquito four,
Mosquito fly out de ol' man door.

Mosquito five,
Mosquito six,
Mosquito break up de ol' man bricks.

Mosquito seven,
Mosquito eight,
Mosquito open de ol' man gate.

Mosquito nine,
Mosquito ten,
Mosquito tickle de ol' man hen.

Callaloo is a spinach dish.

ILLUSTRATION: Caroline Birch

Key Stage 1

3 Riding on a Caravan: A Silk-Road Adventure

BY LAURIE KREBS AND HELEN CANN (Barefoot Books)

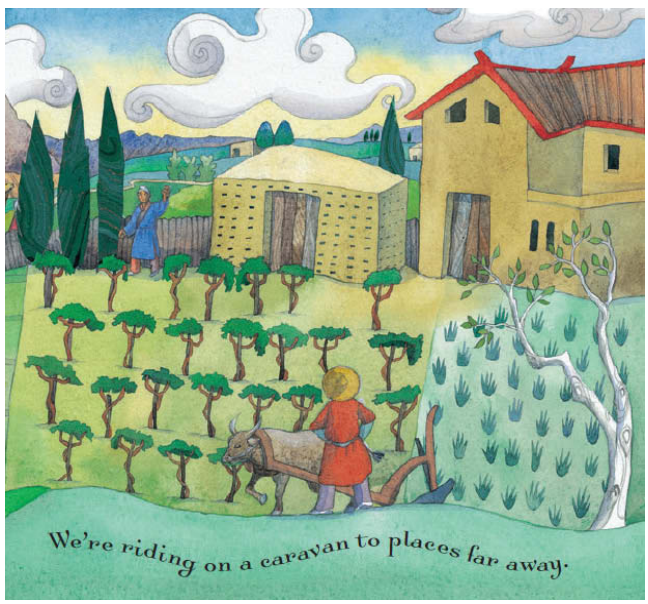
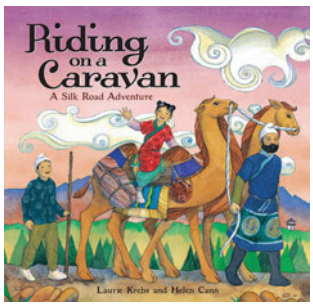


ILLUSTRATION: Helen Cann



What's the story

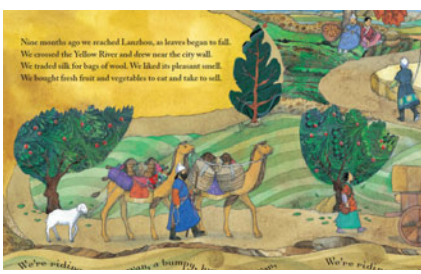
Part story-rhyme about children travelling along the fabled Silk Road, part information text about the history of the trading route and part travelogue, this book is a lovely way to intrigue children about a distant time and place.

Thinking and talking

What tells you this book is set far away? Do you think it's about children now, or long ago? What's produced where you live? Where is it sold? Where and how do you buy things?

Try this...

- **Find the places in this book on a map. Display photos and objects about China and the Silk Road.**
- **Look at the picture showing children sitting round a fire. What are they discussing? Pretend you're warming your hands at a campfire. Talk about your day. Can you tell or write a story about it?**
- **Visit a market and take photographs. Compare with the illustrations in the book and use to inspire writing, artwork and roleplay.**
- **Buy fruit from a market and sell in school, making a small profit for charity. Use this as the inspiration for number work.**



Key Stage 1

4 Football Star

BY MINA JAVAHERBIN AND RENATO ALARCAO (Walker)

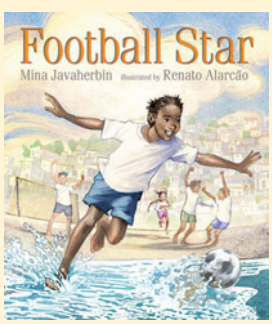


ILLUSTRATION: Renato Alarcao

What's the story?

Paulo works on a fishing boat instead of going to school. Life is tough, but where there's football, there's hope - especially with Paulo's sister on the team! Dedicated to Brazilian footballers who rose from poverty, this book really does celebrate the beautiful game.

Thinking and talking

Do you enjoy playing football? How do you think Paulo and his friends feel when they're playing football? Why do you think they love it so much?

Talk about the jobs these children do. What would you miss about school, if you didn't go? What do the pictures tell you about life in a favela?

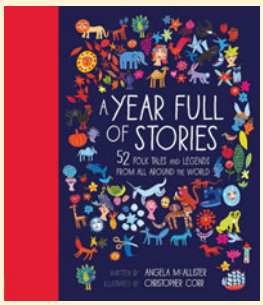
"Football Star is dedicated to Brazilian footballers who rose from poverty"

Try this...

- **Choose a picture and imagine it's a film still. What are the characters saying? Add dialogue using sticky notes. What will happen when you press 'play'? Act it out, write about it or draw a picture sequence.**
- **What does Paulo tell us on the title page? Read his chant and beat the rhythm. Think of a way to introduce yourself in a chant, just like Paulo.**

Key Stage 1

5



A Year Full of Stories – 52 Folktales and Legends from Around the World

BY ANGELA MCALLISTER AND CHRISTOPHER CORR (Frances Lincoln)

"Use to talk about family, friends and customs"

What's the story

More than 30 countries and traditions are represented in this beautifully-designed anthology celebrating cultural events and festivals to mark the changing seasons.

Thinking and talking

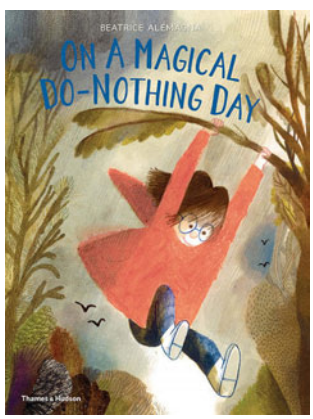
Which story do you like best? Which country does it come from? Do you know anything about the countries featured in this book?

Which festivals do your family celebrate? What makes a good celebration? Talk about family, friends, food, beliefs, responsibilities, customs, etc.

Try this...

- **Mark the countries represented by these stories on a map. Which is your favourite story? Find out about the country it comes from.**
- **Construct a giant whole-year calendar as a wall display. Create designs to represent the festivals and stories in this book and add them to your calendar. Are there other festivals, celebrations or local events you'd like to include? Add children's birthdays, and ask them to write a story for their special day inspired by the tales in this book.**
- **Look at the colourful endpapers. Be picture detectives and link them to the stories they represent. Ask children and their families to share stories about the places they live (true stories, tales their grandma told them, local folktales, legends…). Design an image for every story and assemble to create a busy frieze inspired by the endpapers.**

ILLUSTRATION: Christopher Corr



Key Stage 1

6

On a Magical Do-Nothing Day

BY BEATRICE ALEMAGNA (Thames and Hudson)

What's the story?

You don't have to travel to experience the wonders of the world – sometimes your own backyard is more exciting than you guessed. Alemagna's video game-playing heroine isn't interested in the outdoors. Then she loses her game and everything looks different. "Is there anything to do around here?" she asks, and some snails lead her to a magical landscape. Or is it simply a different way of looking at real life?

This beautifully illustrated picturebook is a hymn to all things slow and makes a great starting point for armchair travellers who want to get to know their own locality.

Thinking and talking

Where is this story set? Have you had adventures in places that were close to home? Look at the pictures. Why do you think Alemagna chose these colours, textures and subjects?

ILLUSTRATION: Beatrice Alemagna

Try this...

- **Organise your own magical do-nothing day. Explore a new location using your senses. Play blindfold games, make rubbings of different textures, draw from life, take photographs, record sounds. Create annotated sketchmaps to show where you went, what you noticed and what you thought about it.**
- **Create mixed-media collage and coloured pencil artwork, inspired by Alemagna's illustrations and the special things you noticed on your magical do-nothing day.**

Illustration by Jöelle Jolivet from The Honey Hunter © Little Gestalten, 2015

Key Stage 2

7 The Honey Hunter

BY KARTHIKA NAIR AND JÖELLE JOLIVET (Little Gestalten)

What's the story?

Shonu lives in a mangrove forest in the Sundarbans, where his father is a honey collector. He knows he mustn't upset the terrifying Demon King by taking honey at the wrong time of year – but when disaster strikes, he's too hungry to resist. The Demon King appears and is about to eat Shonu, when an unusual bargain is struck. Shonu must repay his debt by spending the summer as a tree.

This beautiful picturebook is packed with information about the mythology and customs of a traditional way of life, and features strong environmental themes. The book began as a performance (which has left its mark in the richness and immediacy of its language and storytelling) and Jolivet's Indian-style artwork adds its own theatrical impact.

Thinking and talking

What did you like about this book? What did you learn from it? Which is your favourite picture, and why? Do you know anyone familiar with this area of India / Bangladesh? Can they tell you about it?

Try this...

- **Research the natural history of the mangrove forests and the impact of deforestation and climate change. Learn about the area's mythology and traditional ways of living.**
- **Take elements such as Shonu's transformation or the ferociously protective actions of the Demon King and explore through drama and creative writing. Invent stories for the bees to sing to Shonu and create a performance of your own, complete with brightly-coloured masks and costumes.**

Key Stage 2

8 My Place

BY NADIA WHEATLEY AND DONNA RAWLINS (Walker)

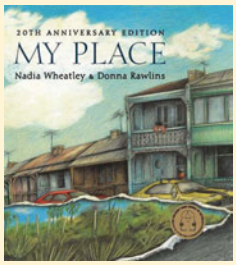
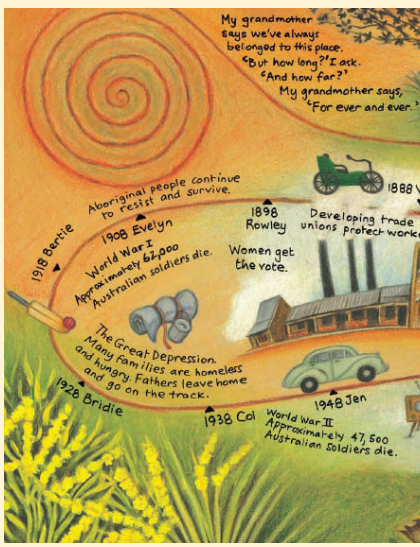


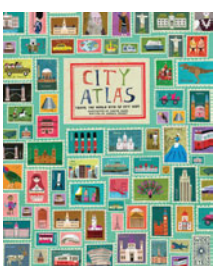
ILLUSTRATION: Donna Rawlins

What's the story?

Have you wondered what your street was like before your house was built, or who lived in it before you? *My Place* explores an Australian neighbourhood through the eyes of the children who live there, from Laura in 1988 all the way back to Barangaroo in 1788. Every spread focuses on a different decade and features a sketch map charting the changes.

Written to mark Australia's bicentenary, this intriguing book encourages readers to ask questions about their own





Key Stage 2

9 City Atlas: Travel the World with 30 City Maps

BY GEORGIA CHERRY AND MARTIN HAAKE (Wide Eyed)

About this book

Thirty iconic cities are brought to life as stylized picture maps featuring local landmarks, celebrities and customs. The illustrations have a pleasingly retro feel and make a good starting point for in depth research.

Thinking and talking

Find a world map and mark the locations of cities in this book. Pool what you know about them. Which city would you like to visit, and why? What's the most interesting fact you discovered? The weirdest? The most surprising?

Try this...

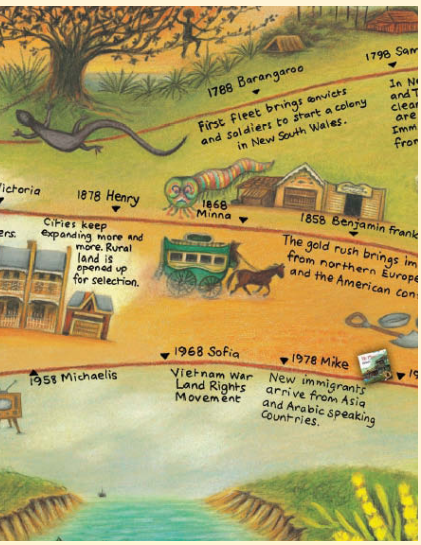
- **Create a picture map of your town. Browse guidebooks and maps to find buildings, customs and landmarks you'd like to feature. Identify a network of key routes and mark on a large sheet of card. Draw your chosen elements, then collage to your background and add text.**
- **Alternatively, children could create individual maps, highlighting the local elements most meaningful to them.**

ILLUSTRATION: Martin Haake

'place' and celebrates the hidden histories of children.

Thinking and talking

What's the most interesting thing you've discovered by reading this book?
Many of the characters in this book are linked. Who is connected, and how? What else do you notice about the construction of this book? For example, every child has a pet; every child talks about the big tree; the water flows along the same course.



Try this...

- **What can we learn about Australia by reading this book? Create mind maps recording your discoveries. What else would you like to know? Find answers using non-fiction books, magazines, the internet and word of mouth.**
- **Draw sketch maps of your place and write about it. Collect the maps in a class book, then exchange with children in another country to find out about their place, too.**
- **Resources including an interactive timeline and author interviews are available at www.myplace.edu.au**

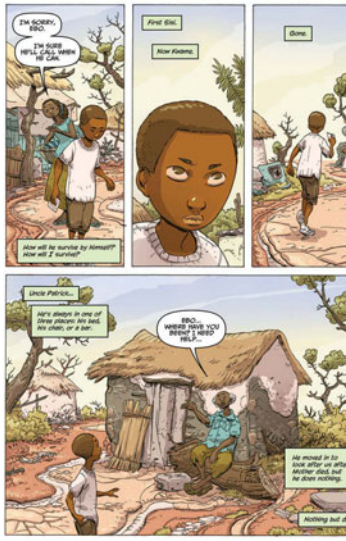
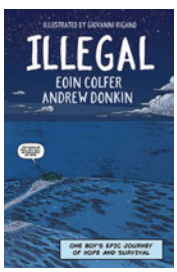


ILLUSTRATION: Giovanni Rigano

10



Key Stage 2

Illegal

BY EOIN COLFER AND ANDREW DONKIN, ILLUSTRATED BY GIOVANNI RIGANO (Hodder)

What's the story?

Along with hundreds of migrants, Ebo and his brother sail from Tripoli, bound for Europe and a better life. Tragedy strikes as their overloaded boat capsizes. After all his optimism and tenacity, will Ebo's journey end in heartache?

Set against realistically depicted backdrops in Nigeria, the Sahara, Tripoli and the Mediterranean, this powerful graphic novel will engage and move upper KS2 readers and give them a forum for debate.

Illegal might not be suitable for everyone – use your judgement about sharing it.

Thinking and talking

Discuss Ebo's journey and the challenges he overcomes. How does he survive and help others? Think about his personal qualities as well as his actions. Why do Ebo and Kwame put themselves through such dangers?

How does the graphic-novel format help us connect with Ebo's story?

"This powerful graphic novel will engage and move upper KS2 readers"

Try this...

- **List the places in this story and find them on a map. What can we learn from the artwork about Nigeria, the Sahara and Tripoli?**
- **Examine the graphic panels. How are close ups used? How quickly does the action progress? Choose a news item and storyboard your ideas for a graphic-novel retelling.**
- **Books like *Illegal* help us understand the human stories behind this crisis, but there are no easy answers. Discuss what's happening to families like Ebo's and how we can help.**

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative development manager at Seven Stories.

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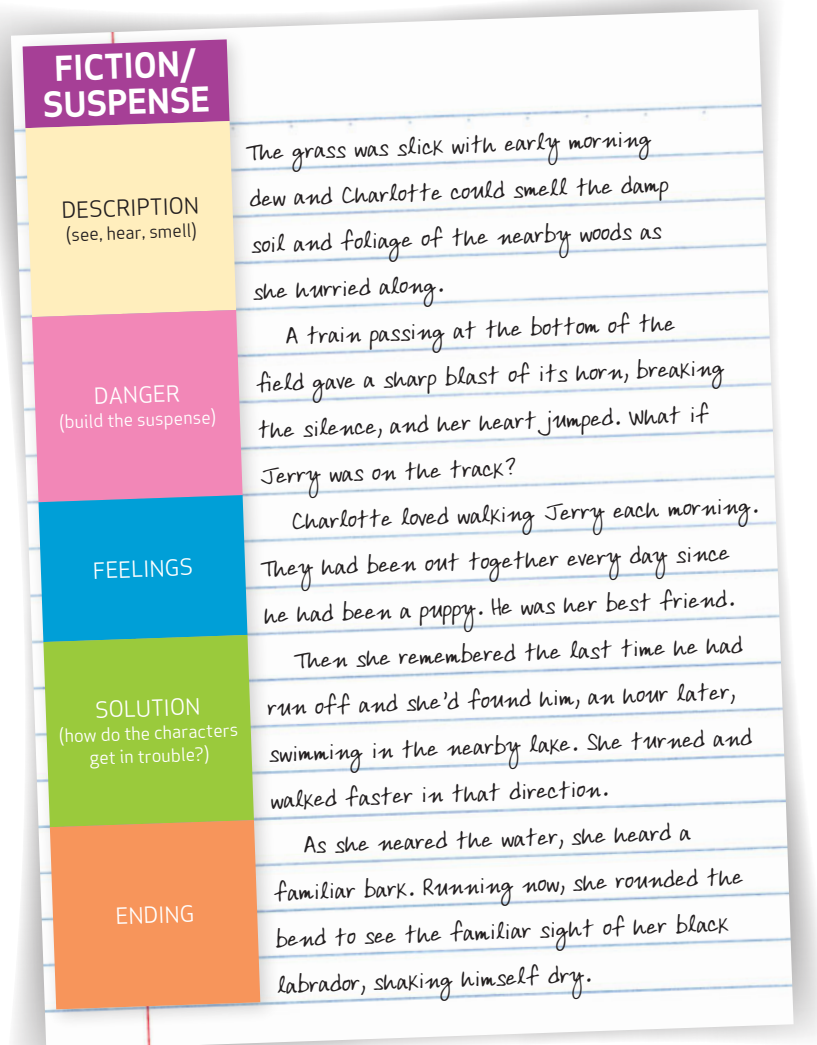
FRANKLIN WATTS

Why all the fuss about STRUCTURE STRIPS?

If you haven't seen the writing tool that's causing so much excitement amongst teachers on Twitter, you should try it in class tomorrow, says **Rebecca Jakes**



I love the promise of a fresh English unit - the hook, the newly written model text, the opportunity to enjoy an unexplored genre. So why is it that so many children struggle with the final outcome?

We've all been there. You've planned a clear learning journey, explored the text with the class and modelled how children can write their own versions. But when you come to mark the work, despite all this build up, you find repetition, a lack of coherence and muddled, undernourished paragraphs. The children have ignored their plans and rushed, giving little thought to the purpose of each section; structure has gone out of the window.

It's hardly surprising. Writing is hard enough to draft when you are an adult, so why do we expect children to compose their work so quickly and easily?

I took to the internet in search of the answer.

What is a structure strip?

It was at this point that I discovered 'structure strips' - a new teaching strategy that's taking the EduTwitter world by storm.

The idea was first created and shared on Twitter by teacher Stephen Lockyer (@mrlockyer) before being championed by Caroline Spalding (@mrsspalding), an assistant head at an all-through school. Put simply, a structure strip is a tool that supports pupils with structuring a text, prompting them to consider what they should include in each paragraph. Though initially used to support children in KS3, the strips are now being picked up by

primary schools across the country.

Structure strips are designed to be stuck in the margin of an exercise book. Every strip is divided into sections that act as a guide for the content, order and relative size of each paragraph. They can be colour coded to make each section stand out, or left plain for simplicity.

Let's take teaching children to write a basic short story as an example. A common approach is to ask pupils to use a simple format: build up, problem, resolution, ending. Placing a structure strip with these headings in the margin of a child's book provides them with a clear reminder of which part of their story they are developing as they write.

Supporting different abilities

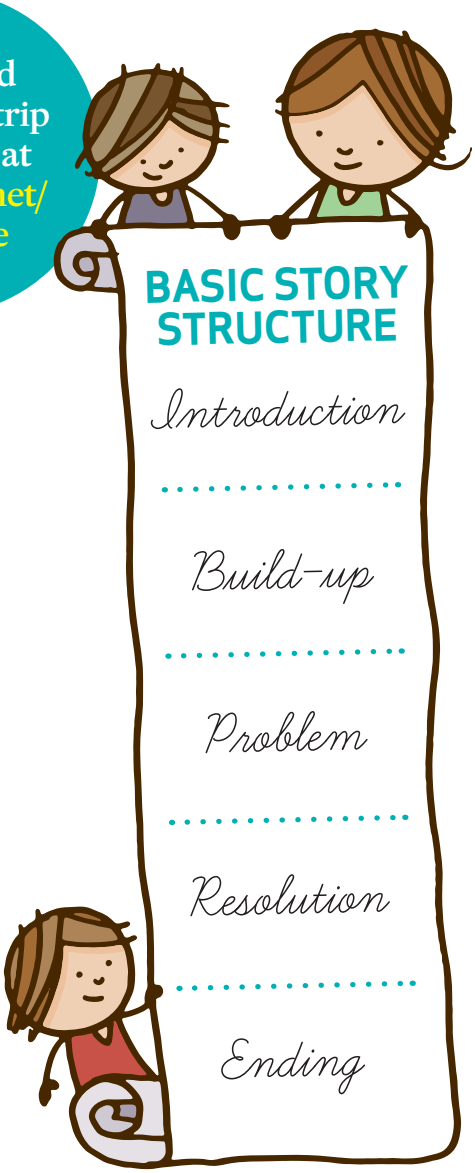
One of the best things about structure strips is that they can be easily adapted according to the level of support you want to give. For example, in the apprentice phase of writing – where pupils are still learning how to a write a story – you might include quite specific prompts, such as key vocabulary or suggestions for different conjunctions or sentence starters. But by the end of a unit when children are producing an independent piece, more generic prompts such as 'build the suspense' or 'show, not tell' can be added to help children develop their writing.

For pupils who need extra support, the sections of a structure strip could contain specific words that you want them to use. You can even add picture prompts if necessary.

The strips are particularly useful for pupils who are aiming to achieve greater depth in writing; this works especially well for Y6 pupils. For example, you could edit the strip to remind them to vary the authorial voice or punctuation and even add an example of what this would look like. "What about moderation?" I hear you cry. Well, writing at greater depth requires practice, and structure strips give children the guidance and support they need whilst learning to do this. Eventually, these new skills will transfer to work that's produced independently.

Structure strips are well suited to teaching non-fiction where there is less room for manoeuvre in terms of layout and ordering of paragraphs. Take a notoriously tricky genre such as an explanation text, for example. Here you can add questions to prompt children (e.g. 'What is the item used for?' or 'Why does this occur?'). Including technical vocabulary also works as an effective reminder.

Download structure strip templates at teachwire.net/structure



What can go wrong?

As with any tool to support writing, structure strips have one or two limitations. They won't, for example, work for every genre and you need to carefully model how they should be used (and I speak from experience).

Take care to ensure children understand they are still writing paragraphs. I had one child who wrote every sentence on a separate line, simply because the introduction of a new strategy completely threw him. Size of handwriting can also cause problems when using the strips. Pupils who struggle with letter formation may find they can only fit one or two sentences in the space provided. There are a couple of ways around this. One is to provide strips with larger sections, and the other is to cut the strip up and only stick in each section once children have finished the previous paragraph.

> "One of the best things about structure strips is that they can be easily adapted according to the level of support you want to give"

For pupils who are very skilled and creative, some may argue this strategy will hold them back, interrupting the flow of their writing. If used carefully, however, they can add an extra level of challenge for more able writers. Asking pupils to create a paragraph in a limited space that builds suspense and imagery forces them to really think about each word and sentence they are using.

Tying in assessment

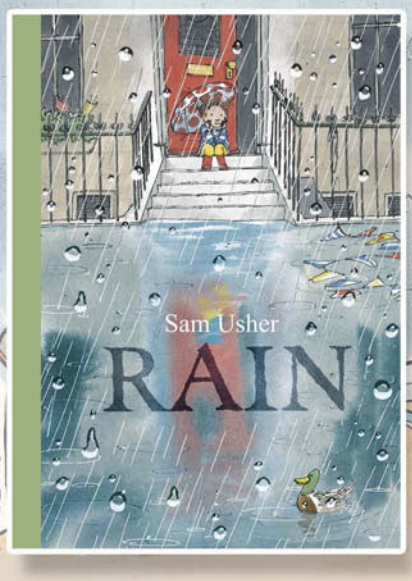
Not only are structure strips a great tool for supporting writing, they can also work as a guide for self and peer-assessment since the sections provide pupils with ready-made criteria against which to mark. There's also scope to focus prompts on the effect of writing on the reader, instead of more technical skills.

Structure strips are an incredibly versatile tool, but it's important to remember that they are just that – a tool. Use them to teach structure, but don't overuse them. Always bring writing back to its purpose to make sure it doesn't become a tick-box exercise, or clunky to read.

Give them a go tomorrow. I bet you won't be disappointed.

REBECCA JAKES is Year 4 teacher at Brockhurst Primary School and a freelance teaching and learning consultant

This April, read Sam Usher's *Rain* to your little ones - an amazing adventure awaits!

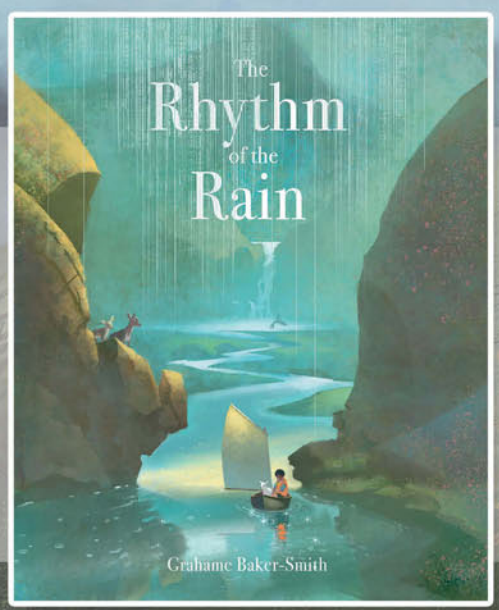


let it rain

perfect picture books for days indoors

From the tiniest raindrop to the deepest ocean Grahame Baker-Smith's *Rhythm of the Rain* is a breath-taking story of the water cycle.

Out Now



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"We all remember a funny teacher"

A good giggle can help children retain important information – and **Greg James** and **Chris Smith** know just how to get one started...

Lots of fairly weird and, hopefully, funny things happen in the classroom in our first children's book, *Kid Normal*. A TV explodes; two tiny horses are released to gallop around; and at one point the whole room gets sprayed with soup. And whilst sadly, none of these specific things actually happened during our own education, it's always the odd and slightly mad events from your school life that you tend to remember, even years later – the moments when the whole class laughs as one. It could be the age-old act of mistakenly calling your teacher 'mum' or 'dad' that causes hoots of laughter, or it might be a rarer, more incredible gem – like when Greg's French teacher became so enraged with his immaturity that he got muddled up and shouted, "Errr, Greg 'ow old are you, err, five o'clock?!" Everyone broke down into tears of laughter – including the teacher. It actually brought the class much closer together, seeing his human side. (In Monsieur's defence, Greg was seventeen at the time…)

So – how important is it to laugh in class? Well, there are quite a few studies that suggest it could be very important indeed. Research has shown that laughter can help recall, for example; quite simply, we tend to remember things that happened when we were feeling really happy. One study revealed that people who watched comedy programmes about the news – like the Daily Show – actually knew more about current affairs afterwards than people who watched the, erm, actual news. And back in 2006, researchers in the US gave two different groups of students the same lecture, but with or without jokes. You probably won't be surprised to hear that the students who laughed during class remembered far more of the information afterwards; because they'd been the most engaged when it was being delivered.

Connection and trust

Besides, laughing together breaks down so many barriers. When we've been doing live events about *Kid Normal*, the moments when people seem to be the most engaged and relaxed are when we're all laughing together. We learnt very quickly to put the silliest, most comedic bit of our show in the first five minutes. It involves one of us donning a top hat and a cape and prancing about asking the children questions. The audiences seem to love it, and everyone is on side immediately. It puts everyone on the same footing – and you're more likely to listen to, and learn from, someone you feel is on your level. Someone who makes you laugh is immediately someone you trust; and of course, that's an important bond to create between teachers and students as well.

We all remember a funny teacher. And we remember the things they taught us (although of course there's a

difference between being laughed *with* and laughed *at*, as every education professional knows). But how do you make children laugh? Well, in very much the same way that you make anyone else laugh – with a bit of surprise, and a lot of fun.

Writing *Kid Normal*, we never really felt that we had to adapt our humour to any particular audience. Maybe that's because we both have an emotional age of about nine. However, children are very sensitive to being talked down to, and we'd never want to do that. So, there are some jokes in the book that not everyone will get – but there are no jokes that deliberately target just one type of person in particular. We simply felt that if something made us laugh, chances are it might make someone else laugh as well.

Funny business

We guess there'll be a lot of teachers reading this who'll now be remembering a moment when they made the kids they were teaching really, really crack up laughing. It's a great feeling, isn't it? So, next time you're having trouble making the latest part of the National Curriculum engaging and fascinating, try introducing some proper, guffaw-inducing humour! Not sure how? Here are some tips that might help...

First, never patronise your pupils. Don't worry that they might not get every part of the joke or reference. We did a great deal of thinking back to the things that made us laugh when we were kids when we started coming up with *Kid Normal* and the conclusion was that we actually quite liked jokes and references that weren't aimed at us. Kids tend to be aspirational, and even when something makes them laugh, it might not be until years later that they truly understand the reference. And that's fine. It happened to me recently when I revisited the great radio comedy *Round The Horne*. Aged eleven, I didn't necessarily know why it was funny, it just was.

Secondly, don't be scared to introduce kids to new jokes or ideas. The age group that we write for has the most open and brilliantly untapped minds and they seem to love exploring and expanding them. In short, don't just give them a load of stuff they already find funny; be brave and trust them to go along with you. They are at an age where they love to learn and they are used to doing so – so they'll actually find it quite exciting.

Finally, be kind, inclusive and silly, with kindness being the most important element. Nasty humour isn't needed here, it serves no purpose. Everyone should feel relaxed and happy and part of the story or joke. Warmth is an incredibly underrated trait and one that should be given a lot of thought and consideration when writing – or 'performing' – for a young audience. Even our bumbling useless villain never feels bullied or belittled by our main characters. His own words and actions implicitly make him a figure of fun, so don't be afraid of being subtle sometimes. Children will understand!

And if all else fails, talk about some baby otters having a wee, as we do in one chapter. Just don't end up spraying soup all over your classroom; the caretaker will kill you.

5 MORE BOOKS WITH THE 'LAUGH OUT LOUD' FACTOR

1. Spy Toys (Mark Powers, Bloomsbury)
Splendidly absurd and thrillingly naughty, this is a riotous piece of storytelling with a seriously warm heart.

2. The Unlikely Adventures of Mabel Jones (Will Mabbitt, Puffin)
There's subtle wit threaded in amongst the obligatory slapstick and gore here; and the narrative explores some serious emotional dilemmas as it bounces from one hilarious scene to the next.

3. Olive and the Bad Mood (Tor Freeman, Templar)
Tor Freeman stylishly demonstrates that even having 'one of those days', when we're followed by our own personal little black cloud for no apparent reason at all, can be a source of humour.

4. Llama United (Scott Allen, Macmillan)
A group of llamas that develop incredible footballing prowess having unwittingly consumed the ashes of the world's most famous soccer star; it's surreal brilliance.

5. There's a Werewolf in My Tent (Pamela Butchart, Nosy Crow)
Pamela Butchart is one of the sharpest writers of comedy fiction for children around – and this is a typical example of her madcap yet relatable storytelling.

GREG JAMES and **CHRIS SMITH** are the authors of *Kid Normal*, and its sequel, *Kid Normal and the Rogue Heroes* (Bloomsbury)

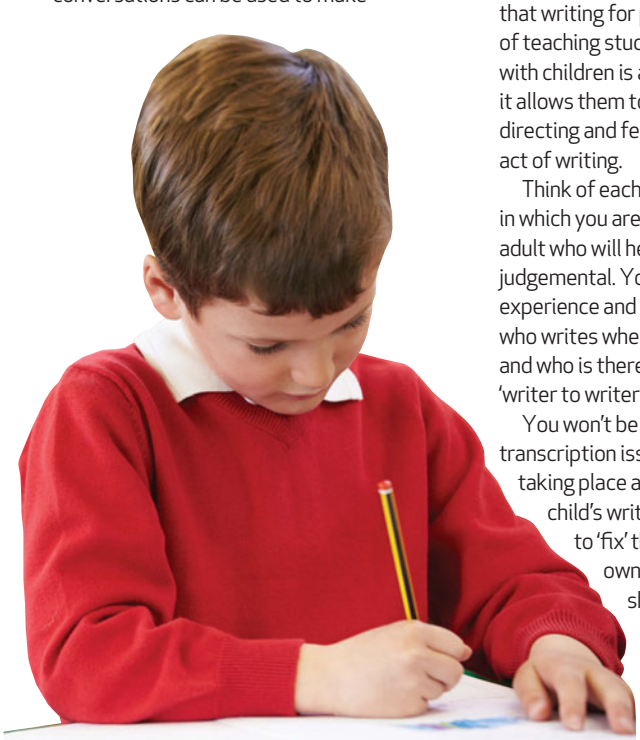
How to run a PUPIL CONFERENCE

Done well, verbal feedback can cut your workload and help children become accomplished writers

Always start with a question. Three simple words: "How's it going?" That's all you need to open up some of the best, most purposeful, satisfying and productive conversations you can have with the young writers in your class.

From this point onwards, there are many benefits to running pupil conferences. We know, for instance, that research emphasises the usefulness of verbal feedback, which is immediate, relevant, and allows children to attend to learning points whilst actually engaged in the process of writing. They can help to alleviate the burden of carrying out time-consuming written feedback, and the interactions you have during these conversations can be used to make assessments of and for learning.

There's more to it than that, of course. In the act of giving students strategies and techniques to be instantly applied to the work in front of them, you are not just improving the written product - you are helping children to become better writers. Surely that should be the highest ambition for writing teachers and writing pedagogy? During each conference you will be giving them a little more 'real writer' knowledge to take forward into new writing assignments - and also into their present and future lives, beyond the school gates.



Reflective, motivated writers

More and more people are adopting the view that writing for pleasure is an important part of teaching students to write, and conferring with children is at the heart of this approach; it allows them to have agency, become self-directing and feel greater motivation in the act of writing.

Think of each conference as a conversation in which you are the trusted and sympathetic adult who will help and advise, without being judgemental. You will be drawing on your own experience and insights as a 'writer-teacher', who writes when possible alongside the class and who is therefore able to talk to pupils 'writer to writer'.

You won't be concentrating on transcription issues - unless the conference is taking place at the editing stage of the child's writing – and you won't be seeking to 'fix' the writing by imposing your own ideas as to how the piece should go. Instead, you will be guiding the children towards making their own reflective and informed writing decisions. Best of all, you will know that you are giving responsive, high-quality and focused tuition to individual writers in a very short space of time (less than five minutes for a conference).

A good conference has a definite shape. In the first part, the child talks about their piece and sets the agenda by identifying a difficulty or an uncertainty. You, as the teacher, take in this information and perhaps tease out a little more, using what you have been told to make a decision to teach just one or two things.

In the second part, you move forward and teach those things you have decided will help the student move towards being a better writer. The transcription below, taken from a conference conducted with a pupil in a Y5 class at the start of a personal writing project, shows how this works.

Teacher: How's it going?

Pupil: Well, I want to write a piece about my grandma, and so to start with I've been trying to make a whole list of things about her that I could put in. [Talking about the writing]

T: (Scans list) There are lots of ideas here, aren't there? I can tell she's quite an

unusual person, isn't she? And I sense that you're really proud of her, and you'll probably want to put that over to your reader. [Responds briefly with interest about the content; gets a line on the pupil's intention as a writer; thinks about making a teaching decision]

P: Yeah. I'd like people to know she's great and she's done some brave things, but I'm having trouble with getting it into a plan, don't know where to start and what order to put stuff in. And what sort of ending to write. [Reflects; states problem and sets agenda for the conference]

T: Mmmm, so you've got lots of information and it's hard to organise it all. Well, I can tell you something real writers often do when they have this problem. They focus on the most interesting thing about that person and they just write about that. You just said you wanted people to know about her courage, right? Well, how about picking the thing that shows that most clearly about her? [Teaches pupil to focus on something specific; refers to 'mentors'- real life writers]

P: (Thinks for a while) Mmm. I suppose that

would be when she ran in the marathon and she never gave up, even when she got so tired she nearly couldn't breathe!

T: Great! I'd certainly like to hear more about that and so will all your other readers. So what will you do next? [Encourages self-regulation]

P: Well, I could plan it - like a story maybe? Beginning at the start of the race and then the middle could be what it was like when she was running, did she talk to anyone and things like that. And then the ending when she nearly didn't make it, or something? [Pupil becomes self-directing]

T: Sounds good to me! So I'll leave you now to get on with your plan. [Supports pupil's self-direction].

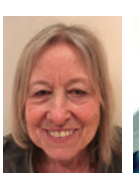
This conference was over, but it wasn't the only one that took place with the same child while she was writing her piece. We have found that it is possible to confer with every child in the class once a week, and some more frequently. Sometimes, children will 'listen in' to someone else's conference and reap the benefits of the advice offered. Peers will conference each other on occasions, too. And we note where similar difficulties are arising and make them the subject of mini-lessons.

It has to be said that conferencing is a skill to be learned and developed through regular practice, but you will in time become adept at asking the sorts of questions that offer up the information you need and enable you to give your pupils the kinds of advice that will help them as writers.

TRY IT OUT

If you'd like to try the pupil conferencing approach, you'll find lots more information about how it can work on the authors' website (literacyforpleasure.wordpress.com). This includes a set of 'conference cards' to download with question prompts that can aid you and your teaching assistant to learn the techniques.

Another avenue that's definitely worth exploring is to pick up a copy of Carl Anderson's book on pupil conferencing, aptly titled *How's It Going?*



FELICITY FERGUSON and **ROSS YOUNG** are experienced primary teachers with a particular interest in literacy.
literacyforpleasure.wordpress.com
@writingrocks_17.

"Kids are great at sniffing out embedded messages – and rejecting them"

Jeff Kinney thinks children should be allowed to enjoy books on their own terms...

It was my father's job to teach us to read – I was one of four kids, and our parents were keen to give us that early leg-up. He started us on the Dick and Jane series, which I remember as the most boring, awful books. But of course, the tedious repetition of dull phrases eventually led to mastery, which was the start of much bigger and better things.

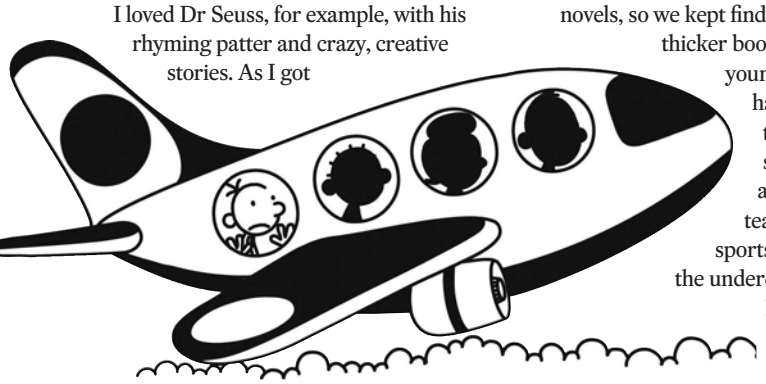
Sure enough, when I got to school I found myself ahead of the other children, both in terms of reading and artistic skills. It was nice to seal that advantage, and in fact, it quickly became a part of my identity; the acknowledgment and praise I got from teachers and my parents increased my motivation, which in turn further improved my work, and so on.

Our house was filled with books. My mother was an early years educator, and she'd bring home award-winning and surplus titles from the preschool where she worked. This was normality for us – it wasn't until I was in my 30s that I really understood how lucky we had been to have that kind of access to reading material. Realising that some kids grow up without a single book at home came as quite a shock.

My favourite books when I was young were definitely those with big, colourful pictures. But the words mattered, too – I loved Dr Seuss, for example, with his rhyming patter and crazy, creative stories. As I got older, I discovered the great poetry and tales of Shel Silverstein; I was always drawn to that combination of masterful writing, with masterful illustration. And looking back, I can see that I was especially happy when both aspects were the product of a single imagination, as in the work of Maurice Sendak, or Leo Lionni's *Swimmy*. I don't know exactly why, but that seemed to make the interplay between text and images particularly resonant for me

Most kids fall out of love with books a bit as a teen – and I was no exception. I would say that I was a voracious reader up to, maybe, my first two years of high school. But at that point I started to become increasingly less likely to pick up a book for fun; and by the time I was in college, with so much required reading, the idea of doing it as a leisure activity too seemed ridiculous. Eventually, though, I came back to it; I think that's a fairly standard evolution.

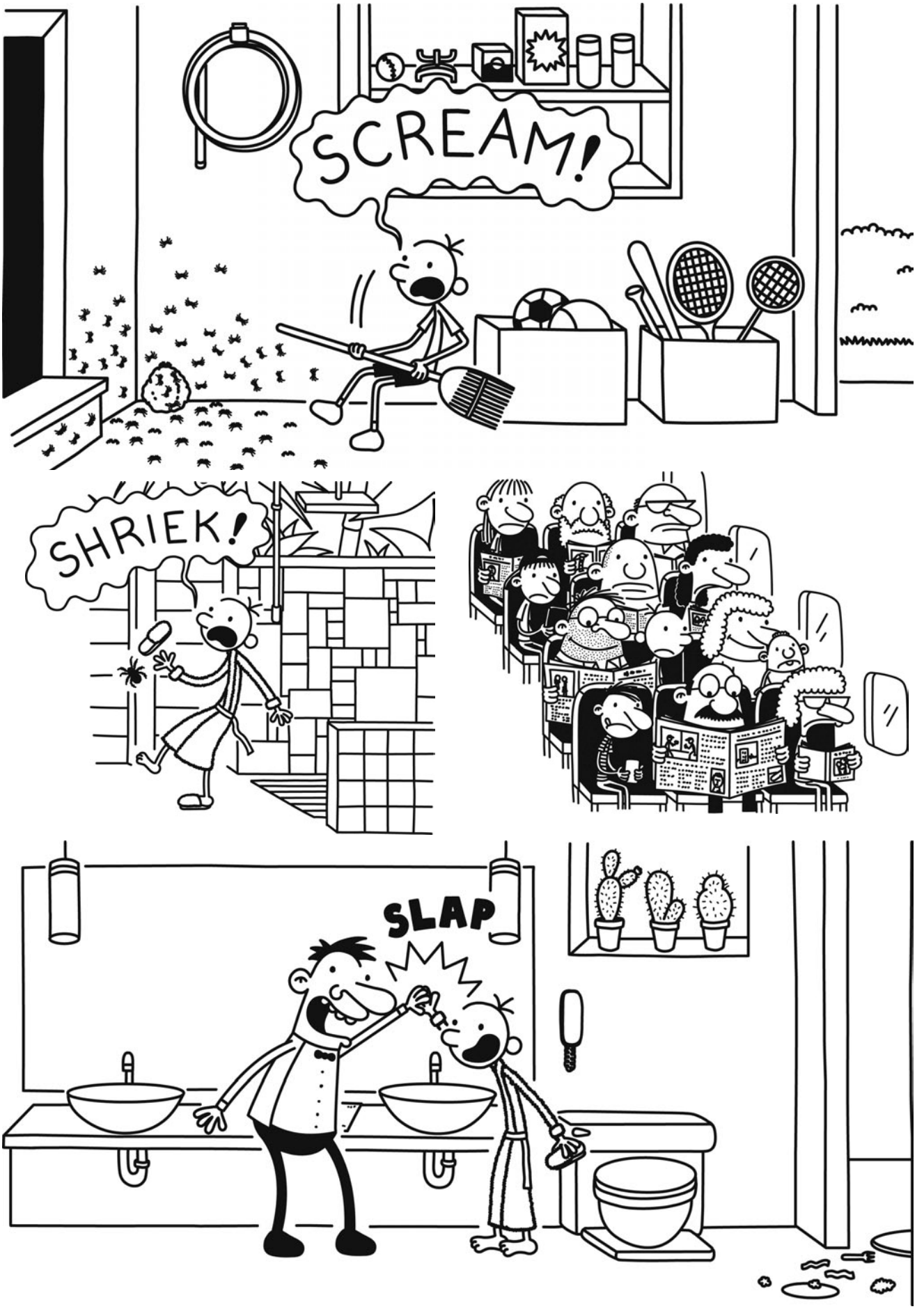
As an author, and as someone who now owns a bookstore, I certainly hoped that my own kids would be readers; but as parents, we were very careful not to force it. I think the best thing we can do for our children is try and find reading material that speaks to their particular interests, rather than offer them the stories we loved when we were younger, or that we think are somehow 'elevated'. Our older son got into fantasy novels, so we kept finding him bigger and thicker books in that genre; our younger boy, on the other hand, only really liked to read about sports, so we gave him books about basketball teams, biographies of sportspeople, 'triumph of the underdog' tales, and stuff like that. Interestingly, he's recently started picking up fantasy novels, too.



I think a lot of times, when grown ups write for kids, they feel that they have to put a message in there; in other words, through reading the story, the child is supposed to learn something from the adult. The trouble is, kids are great at sniffing out those embedded messages, and rejecting them on principal. They don't want to be taught something – they are looking for entertainment. With *Wimpy Kid*, the 'message' is: reading is enjoyable; books are great. And maybe that's one reason why young people often still pick up those titles well into their teens, because they can enjoy them on their own terms. I can totally understand that – I think that Carl Barks' comic books represent some of the best storytelling I've ever read, and I still get great pleasure from reading them; so I'm delighted that *Wimpy Kid* has older readers as well as young ones, especially as when I started out, I was actually trying to write a nostalgia piece for grown ups.

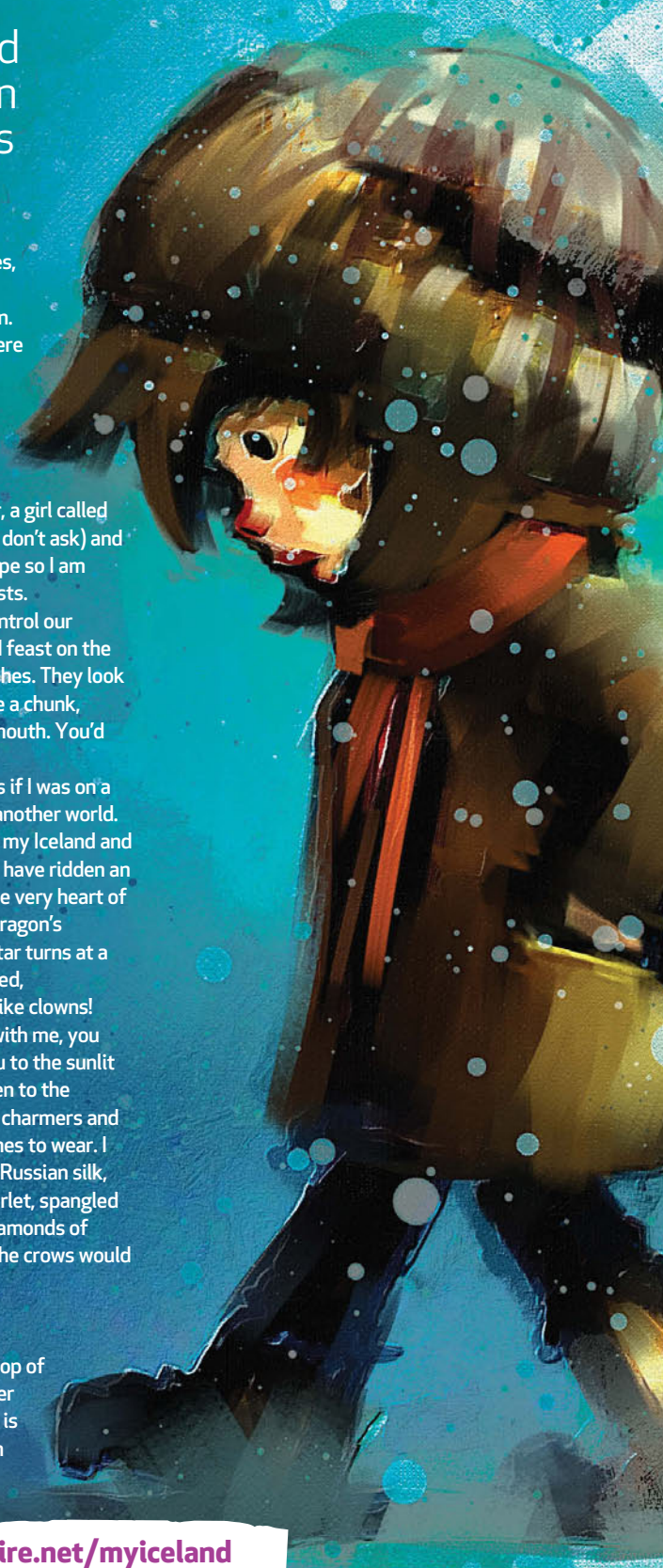
If I have one message for primary school teachers, it would be this: I believe that putting a book into a kid's hands that he or she will really enjoy is a sacred act. And I think that nothing really compares to a physical book; in our store, we don't sell digital titles, and we don't discount books, either, because we think it's wrong and dangerous to devalue them. If you put a book into my hands that I loved as a child, I will instantly feel all its magic – that's incredibly powerful. So I'd like to thank educators for taking on such a profoundly important mission.

The 12th title in Jeff Kinney's *Diary of A Wimpy Kid* series, *The Getaway*, is published by Puffin, and available in hardback now.



My ICELAND

Children are expert day dreamers and with **Pie Corbett's** model text you can channel this into writing about worlds full of wonder and secrets



I have just finished trying to hold my breath for a minute when I notice the fly. It is crawling up the windowpane. Why doesn't it just fall off? Everyone knows that glass is slippery and walking sideways up a glass wall just has to be impossible.

That's not all though, because water boatmen sit on top of the water. How come? I watched a film about this. If you look closely enough you can see how the water bends where they place their legs. It is almost as if the water's surface is a thin skin that they skate across.

I have so much to think about. Why don't rainbows wobble in the wind? How do clouds stay in the sky when they are full of rain? So much seems impossible!

Startled by the cat's cry, I watch her leap onto the windowsill. She stares down at the starlings that I know are lined up on the telephone wire. They are waiting to fly to Africa. How do they know where to go? A starling doesn't have a map, let alone a satnav. My mother says that she forgets where she has parked the car! How can a tiny bird's brain remember the distance from here to Africa?

I am learning to read the ceiling.

There are straight lines where the tiles have been placed but the paint is cracked and these lines are crazy. They are starched roadmaps. I always start in the same place, by the corner where I have imagined our house, and this room. Then my mind travels along the roads, down each hairline fracture and across stark landscapes of sheer white. It is my Iceland; a world of perfect snow contained within a rectangle. In this world, I discovered: hidden gulleys where goblins skulk; shadowed valleys where trolls roam; sly corners where cold secrets hide; steel mantraps waiting to snare your legs in metal teeth; sharp corners ready to snap your icy bones. A few webs have gathered in corners. Dust seems to cling in crevices, but mostly it is sheer white.

This flat world is what I own. When it is daytime, that's where I roam, creating stories in my head about what happens there. At night, when it is dark, I dream myself in to this other world. I have three friends who live there – Peter, a girl called Fudge (I have no idea why, so don't ask) and a boy who is only a vague shape so I am never too sure if he really exists.

In the day, I gaze up and control our games. We fish the rivers and feast on the sweet fruit that grows on bushes. They look like apples and, when you bite a chunk, sweet juice bursts into your mouth. You'd never starve there!

At night, I watch us roam as if I was on a spaceship staring down into another world. But I am looking up. We roam my Iceland and there, nothing is impossible. I have ridden an eagle's back, ventured into the very heart of a mountain's darkness for a dragon's treasure and once, we were star turns at a circus; how we sang and danced, somersaulting and tumbling like clowns!

If only you could be there with me, you would love it. I would take you to the sunlit market square. We could listen to the storytellers, watch the snake charmers and buy the most outlandish clothes to wear. I would dress you in the finest Russian silk, with a turquoise shirt and scarlet, spangled shoes. Your eyes would be diamonds of glittering laughter and even the crows would clap their wings.

I have found that in my Iceland, less can be more.

The fly has made it to the top of the windowpane. Soon, Mother will come upstairs. My mouth is dry. The hands of the clock on the wall crawl round.

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

LET'S GET STARTED

As a child, I used to read a comic called *Look and Learn*. Mostly of my weekly reading diet was spent poring over the seemingly impossible and amazing things found in nature.

This story is based around what some children spend a lot of time doing – daydreaming and inventing. The three make-believe or invisible 'friends' did exist for me when I was about seven or eight years old. They hung around for a few years and kept me occupied when I was lonely. The cracks on the ceiling existed too and so did the other worlds. Many children create imaginary landscapes or persona for themselves. Sadly, this habit fades as we grow older and begin to accept that life is mundane.

Hook in the class

Tune the children into the story by starting with a discussion about daydreams and secret worlds that we all create. Show the children several pictures of the icy landscape in Iceland, otherwise many children will just think of the supermarket. Google a few ceilings that show hairline cracks that look a bit like strange maps. Brainstorm with the class what the cracks look like – make a list of similes, e.g. *the cracks in the ceiling are like – a strange road map, strands of hair, a skeleton leaf, a city from space, etc.*

HIDDEN WORD GAME

I have hidden lots of references to the word 'star' (both in spelling and word combinations, e.g. 'star burst'). How many can your class find? Why did I hide so many stars in the story?

Expand vocabulary

Read the story through, underline difficult vocabulary and discuss any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. List examples or synonyms and then try using the words in sentences. Use the words over a number of days for grammar games as well as rapid reading, spelling and when writing creative sentences. Ask the children to skim read the text and underline any words or phrases that 'need talking about' (e.g. *predatory, aquatic, hairline fracture, crevice, outlandish, spangled*).

Oral comprehension

Read the story through and explore it by taking initial responses from the class. What do they like or not like? What interests or surprises them? What questions does it suggest? Then go carefully through it again, ensuring that the vocabulary is in place and that everyone can read the text. Try repeating any tricky lines, using expression and have the children copy how you read. Tease away at the developing and deepening understanding through questioning:

- What does the fact that the main character was holding his breath and watching flies suggest?
- What do the first four paragraphs tell you about the main character?
- Why might the main character have 'so much to think about'?
- What does it mean, 'I am learning to read the ceiling'?
- How does the world in the 6th paragraph differ from the 8th and 9th and what might this imply?
- How does the imaginary world compare to the real world of the story?
- What does the author mean by, 'crows would clap their wings'?
- Explain what you think the main character means by 'less can be more'?
- Why is the character's mouth dry and what might be implied from this?
- Explain the final line.
- Why is the story called 'My Iceland'?
- Talk about the theme of impossibility and possibility, referring to the text to support your ideas.

Explore through drama

Drama is a key strategy to help children deepen their imaginative and emotional engagement with a story. Once the children can read the text fluently and have discussed it in depth, deepen understanding with the following drama tasks:

- Form groups of three as the invisible friends – gossip about the main character and their travels.
- Imagine that you were in the main square – what did you see, hear and what happened?
- What do other people say about the main character – the mother, teacher, friends, brothers and sisters?
- In role as the main character, tell the story of one of the adventures.
- In role as a storyteller in the market square, tell a simple story to the class.
- Try eavesdropping: you have overheard the main character talking to the invisible friends – what did you hear?

Grammar focus - colons

Identify, or build into the model, several grammar focuses. For instance, in My Iceland, I have focused on the use of the colon to introduce a descriptive list. The list itself is separated by semicolons as the descriptions are detailed. Isolate the pattern so that it can be studied and then work as a class to invent new examples. Children can then try writing their own, using the same underlying pattern. For example:

Original - *In this world, I discovered: gulleys where goblins skulk; valleys where trolls roam; sly corners where secrets hide; mantraps waiting to snare your legs in metal teeth; sharp corners ready to snap your bones.*

New version - *In this world, I saw: tiny fish like splinters of light swimming in cool rock pools; black sand drifting into ominous dunes; herons waiting at the sea's edge, watching; tongue-tied swimmers standing silently by a life-guard's post.*

Planning your own stories

Less confident writers could use the same plot idea to create their own imaginary worlds.

Underlying plot idea	New ideas
Main character (MC) describes what is in their imaginary world	*Toni imagines 'Coritzia' which is a world of dragons*
MC describes what happens in the daytime in the imaginary world	*In the daytime, it is a cheerful place with beaches, small villages and distant mountains where you can find dragon caves and treasure*
MC describes what happens at night in the imaginary world	*At night, there is a huge fun fair by the sea with water slides and swimming pools*
MC describes what the reader might do in the imaginary world	*You would both travel to an enchanted forest to visit the elves*

Create a writing toolkit

A key aspect to this sort of story is building the description of the imaginary world so readers can easily picture it.

- Choose a name that suggests something about the setting, e.g. My Iceland
- Show the setting and what happens through the character's eyes, e.g. *I watch us….*
- Use detailed descriptions of the setting separated by semicolons, e.g. *In this world, I discovered: gulleys where goblins skulk; valleys where trolls roam, etc.*
- Pick out unusual details, e.g. *scarlet, spangled shoes*
- Use the weather to create a mood, e.g. *sunlit market square*
- Suggest how characters feel by their reactions, e.g. *Your eyes would be diamonds of glittering laughter*

Moving into writing

Show children how to create their own fantasy worlds by using a list poem. Begin by making a list of things that can be seen, e.g. clouds, a forest, parrots, mountains, the ocean, rivers, trees, valleys, hawks, etc. Then extend each idea using well-chosen adjectives. For example:

In this world, I discovered: silver clouds drifting across an emerald forest; golden parrots with brittle beaks pecking at scarlet fruit; distant mountains gleaming in sunlight like hunched giants; a turquoise ocean fed by meandering rivers, etc.

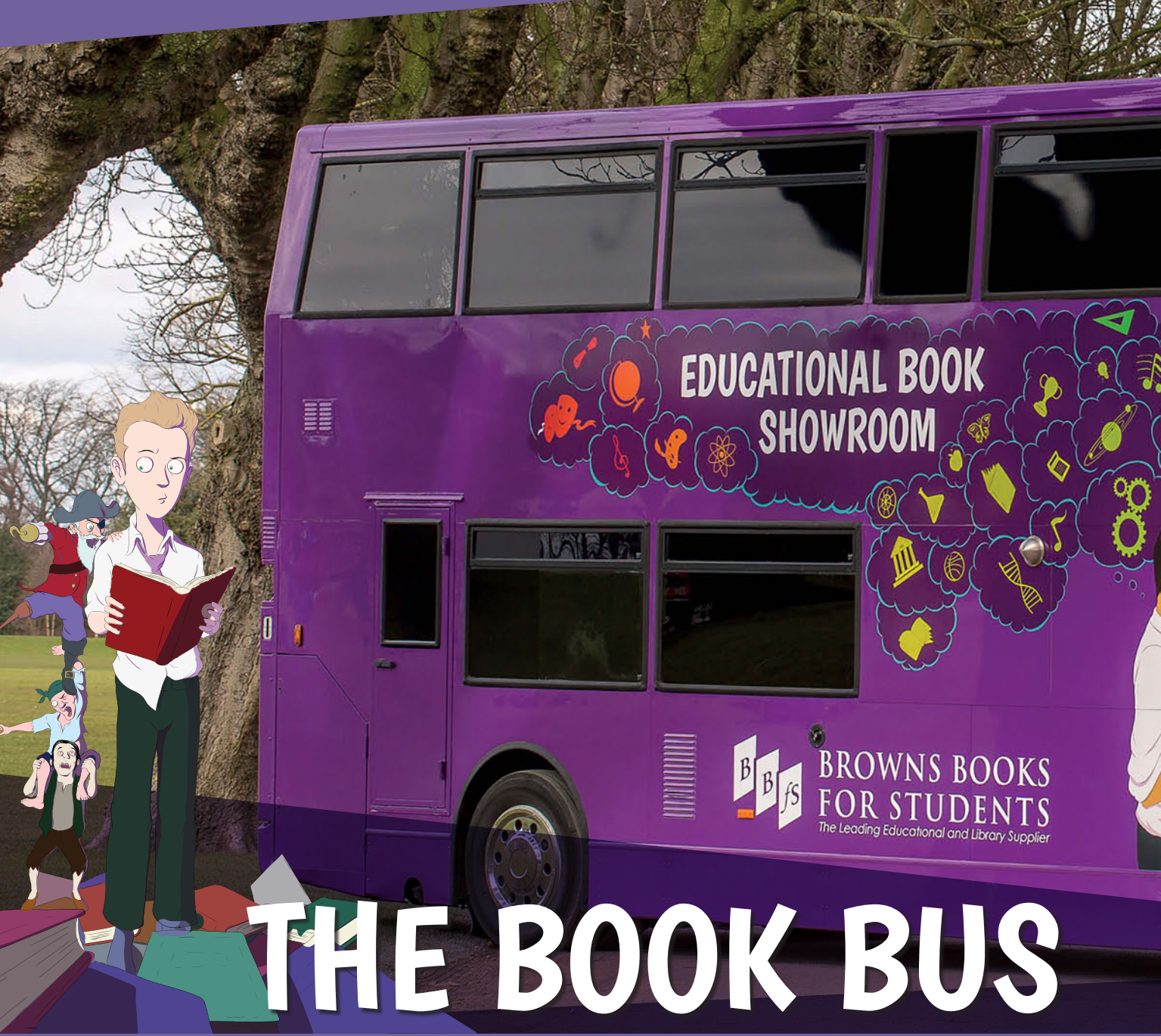
Then use shared writing to model how to write a short story about a character who imagines another world; place the focus on describing the fantasy landscape, possibly drawing on ideas from the poem. Try experimenting with the present tense and first person, for example:

I stare into the fire and a moment later, I am in Santorn. Sun streams through silver clouds onto the emerald forest. I stare up into the branches where golden parrots preen their feathers and peck at crimson fruits that hang like crystals.

PIE CORBETT is an author and former headteacher.

More writing activities

- In role, write the diary entry of any event hinted at in the story.
- Write an information report about the imaginary world – what it is called, where it is, what is the landscape like, the climate, what grows there, how does it change with each season?
- Find out how a fly can climb a window and why water boatmen do not sink. Write an explanation.
- Write a set of magical instructions titled, 'How to steal a dragon's treasure'.
- Write about five ways to charm a snake, a dragon, a goblin or a troll.
- Discuss whether it is a good thing to use your imagination or not.
- Advertise for visitors to come to your imaginary world.



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SCENE PLAY

It's not just books that tell stories – so why not use the powerful appeal of movies to explore narratives in new ways, suggests **Irena Brignull**

I recently found myself in a paediatric A&E department waiting for my eldest child's knee to be seen to. Children's books were piled on a table. A couple of them were being read, but *Shrek* was playing on the television and – yes, you guessed it – most of the youngsters had gravitated around that. Now I get their choice, particularly if they weren't feeling well. It's often easier to be the audience than a reader. Plus, *Shrek* and many other movies like it are top-notch, high quality entertainment. And, let's be honest, books are part of school and learning and effort, and movies just aren't. But here's my question: should they be? If these movies are so well-written, so well-known and loved, could they play a part in teaching children to read and write?

Now, I'm a children's author and a screenwriter so I love both books and movies. I'm also a mum of three who's trying to encourage an appreciation of both in my kids. But I have to admit that, though I treasure family movie nights, the biggest thrill for me is to see my kids so lost in a book that they don't notice anything else around them. Books do demand more but, as we know, the rewards are so very plentiful and personal. I'm interested in anything that gets my children reading. Books – yes, of course. Comics and newspaper articles – sure, great. But how about a scene or two from a screenplay?

A deeper understanding

The other day I tried it. I gave my youngest a couple of pages from my screenplay of *The Little Prince* to read. He had watched the movie so knew the plot and the characters, which helped motivate him. Reading the parts felt like more of a game than a chore. With his school reading books, one of my common negotiating ploys is to take it in turns – you read one paragraph, I'll read the next. With the script pages, this 'taking it in turns' approach was no longer a bargaining chip but instead, a necessary part of the process. I played the Aviator and he played The Little Prince, and believe me, there is something truly lovely about hearing Saint Exupery's iconic words – "Please, draw me a sheep" – spoken with the voice of a child.

The next night, we tried *The Boxtrolls*, another animated movie I've written. My son knows this story even better. It concerns a boy and his boxtroll family and, remembering this, my son used more intonation and expression when he read the lines. He was really understanding it – not just the meaning, but the humour and emotion as well. It helped that the layout of the dialogue was easy for him to track, and although him seeing it on screen first might seem a bit like 'cheating', actually, this was the magic of it. His familiarity meant that he could fully interpret it. We were able to discuss the characters and their dilemmas in a way we'd simply never done before.

5 GREAT SCENES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

- **TOY STORY 3**
  Andy saying goodbye to Woody at the end
- **FINDING NEMO**
  The shark scene
- **SHREK**
  Shrek and Princess Fiona's first meeting
- **THE BOXTROLLS**
  Winnie telling Eggs that he's a boy
- **THE LITTLE PRINCE**
  The Little Girl meeting the Aviator

Scenes for reading and writing

I have no teaching experience so, teachers, please forgive any naivety or ignorance on my part as I offer you up some examples of how you could potentially use movies as a learning resource. Take a film that the children all know and love. For me, the screenplay for *Finding Nemo* is one of the best, layering plot, character and themes within a beautifully crafted structure. Pick out a couple of key scenes: the angler scene in the dark depths of the ocean is a great, funny two-hander and a brilliant counterpart to the scene following Nemo and Marlin's reunion at the end; Dory's 'just keep swimming' philosophy from the first clip turns into a rousing call for unity in the face of destruction in the second. After they've viewed the clips, get the children to read the scenes, preferably more than once so their confidence can grow. This is easy to do with screenplays, perhaps more tricky with passages of prose from novels. Talk about who the characters are at the

> "These stories are rich in ideas and emotion. And best of all, they are loved."

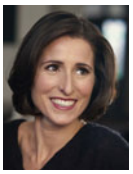
start of the story and how their adventure changes them. This is a key component of screenwriting. In script meetings, we talk a lot – for years sometimes – about a character's journey and how events affect psychology. In *Finding Nemo*, the overly protective parent has to recognise that it is his paranoia that has put his child in jeopardy. He must put his fears aside, embrace life and all its risks, and have faith in his son.

I'm hoping that screenplays might offer children a different, more performance based reading experience. But trying to write a scene has many benefits too. I've started going into schools and doing workshops on the difference between screenwriting and novel writing. With the older students, I give them a passage from my first novel (one that's mostly prose, with plenty of description of setting and inner thought) and we adapt it into a scene of action and dialogue. With the younger children, I use a classic fairy tale. I've found that writing a scene can seem a less daunting task than writing a story from scratch. As it's mainly dialogue, there is less of a disconnect between how a student might think and speak, and how they write. Moreover, a scene is much easier to edit than a piece of prose. Since most of script writing is editing, I've encouraged the children I work with to have a second and even third go at their script, cutting dialogue that isn't necessary, thinking about when to start a scene and when to finish (often part-way into the action).

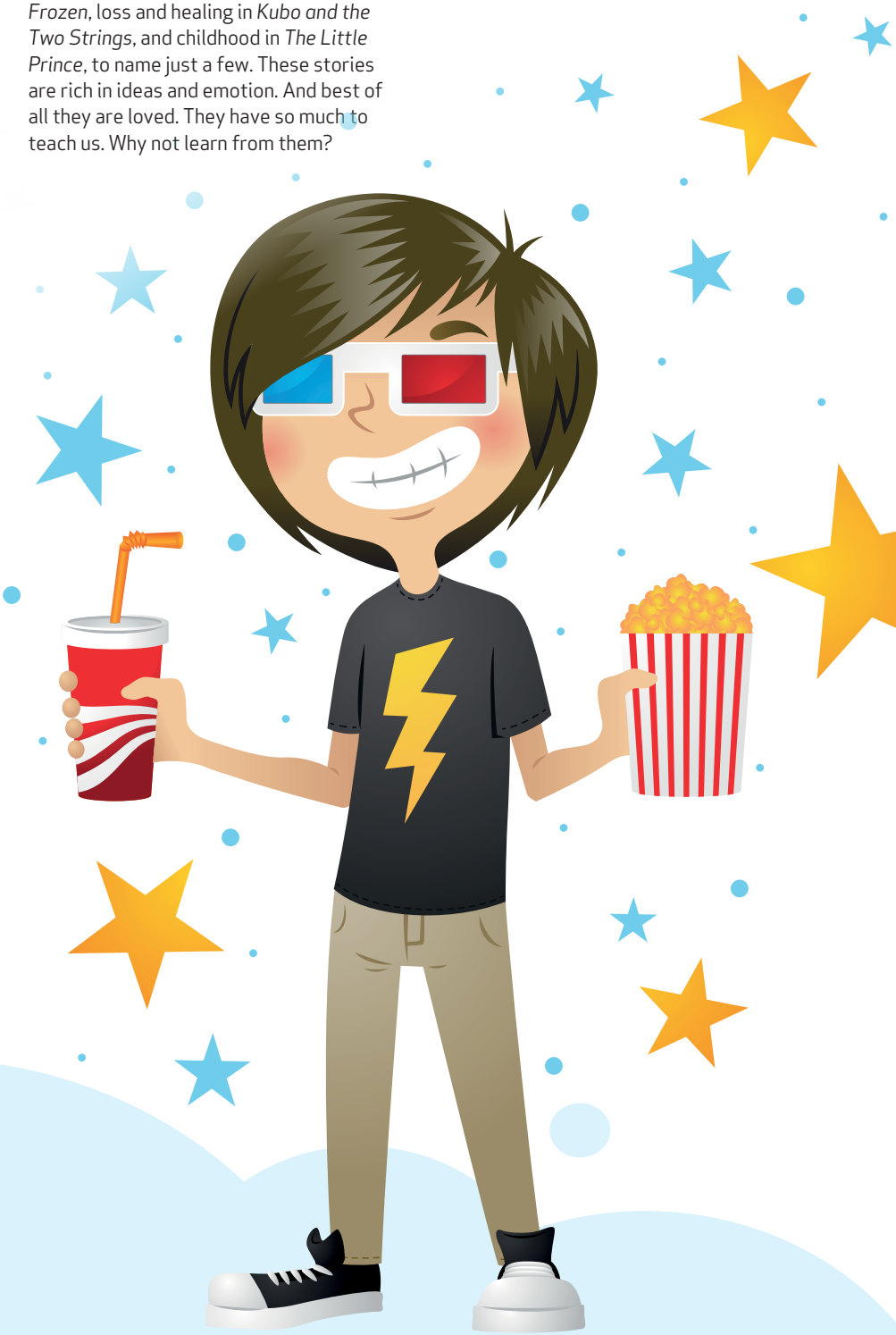
Adapt and inspire

Adapting a movie scene into a novel one is also a brilliant exercise. For instance, look at the section in *The Little Prince* movie where the Aviator has to tell the Little Girl that she can't go with him when he leaves to see the Little Prince. The lines are full of subtext and emotional undertones. We reworked this scene so many times, trying to give it both delicacy and power. How would this moment differ in a novel? Would it tell us how the Little Girl is feeling? Would it explain the hard message that the Aviator is really trying to convey? Without the visuals, the music, the performance, how would the setting, the mood, the characters be described?

Well known movies offer incredible opportunities to talk in depth about character and themes. Recent Oscar winner, *Zootopia*, tackles racism. *Inside Out* takes us into the brain and looks at the coexistence of joy and sadness. Friendship is dramatised in *Toy Story*, eastern philosophy in *Kung Fu Panda*, feminism in *Frozen*, loss and healing in *Kubo and the Two Strings*, and childhood in *The Little Prince*, to name just a few. These stories are rich in ideas and emotion. And best of all they are loved. They have so much to teach us. Why not learn from them?



IRENA BRIGNULL is a successful screenwriter and author. Her novels, *The Hawkweed Prophecy* and *The Hawkweed Legacy* are available now.



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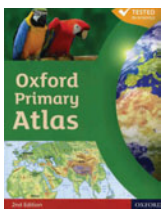

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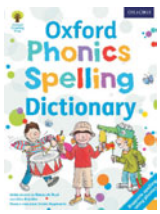

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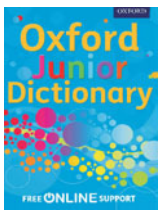

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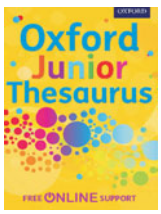

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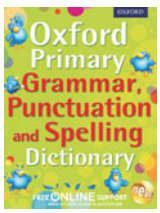

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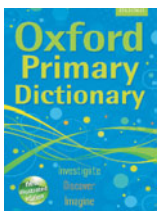

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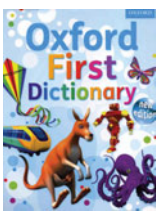

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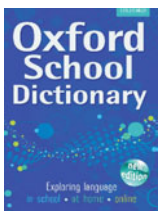

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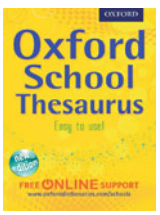

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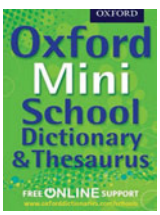

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Make it MATTER

Want to see extraordinary writing from your pupils? Give them a real reason to write, urges **Debra Kidd**

The polar bear is desperate. The people in the town have made it painfully clear that he's not welcome there. His ice is melting, and the land the rangers have set aside for him is dangerously low on prey. "We could take him to the zoo," suggests one child. "He'd be safe there." And so they're off, researching the zoos that might be suitable for the polar bear.

What if?

We'd started with an image from *The Journey Home*, by Frann Preston-Gannon, of a somewhat sad looking polar bear sitting on a lump of ice. The children felt sorry for him, but now, having explored the points of view of human beings living in close proximity to the creature, they're not sure quite how sorry. That process has taken them through reading fiction and fact and into drama and discussions underpinned by information and knowledge. It has taken them to a place of carefully considered investment. They are under no anthropomorphic illusions about the power of the bear – but they still want to help. Nor are they being lied to. All of the context is introduced within the realm of "what if..."

What if there were a bear like this one?
What if the people didn't want him?
Let's say the people at the zoo wrote back to us – shall I read out a letter of what they might say?
In our story, what might we do next?

This is dilemma led learning – where one person's point of view can happily clash with another's and there's not necessarily a right or wrong answer. We're all just muddling along, making the best decisions we can under the circumstances, but always caring enough to want to try for the very best outcomes.

So, the children write a letter to the zookeepers in three zoos with a good reputation for conservation – Singapore, Chester and San Diego. They explain the polar bear's dilemma and ask if the zoo could accommodate the animal.

Both San Diego and Chester (via the teacher, in role!) reply with regret. They, sadly, have no space or resources to give the bear what he needs. However, Singapore replies to say they already have one bear and could make way for a second, but they might need some help in redesigning his enclosure.

The children read more about Singapore Zoo and they find some disturbing information. The climate is hot, and the enclosure small. Visitors have reported how sad the polar bear already there seems. It looks like this might not be a great solution after all.

Still, they get to work, redesigning a bigger enclosure. And they come up with a range of solutions to the problem of climate – including an amazing 'freezer land' environment complete with snow machine. They send their scaled drawings off and get some questions back. How much will this cost? Have they considered the impact on the environment of such a high energy option?

More dilemma. So the children read about different power options – solar, wind, hydroelectric. They write their answers and reassure the zoo that the energy production can be carbon neutral.

Driven by concern

And so the bear has a new home – a cold patch in a tropical place. It's not ideal. But it's better than starving.

He makes friends – orangutans, African elephants, pandas – and all have their tales to tell. The animals appreciate the efforts of their zoo keepers, but they start to question why their habitats are disappearing. They mount a protest, and each animal group makes a statement:

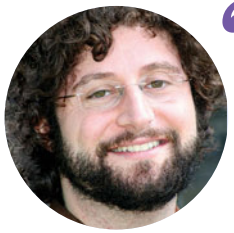
Dear Human Beings of the World...

The children write speeches, infused with knowledge from poaching to palm oil. But they are not doing any of this work to pass SATs or meet moderation criteria. They are fuelled by *concern*. And of all the energy sources a teacher can tap into, concern is the best. Concern fuels investment. It leads to obsession. It makes a child say "we must/we need/we have to..." Not "do we have to? Why are we doing this?" Concern makes time fly. It motivates the desire to know more, to find evidence, to provide solutions.

So when you are thinking of reading/writing/speaking tasks for children, think not "What's the task?" but rather, "What's the purpose?" Make it matter. And what you get back will be better than you thought possible.

ILLUSTRATION FROM: *The Journey Home* by Frann Preston-Gannon

DEBRA KIDD taught for 23 years and still teaches as a visitor in schools. She is the co-author, with Hywel Roberts, of "Uncharted Territories: Adventures in Learning" which is packed full of ideas for building concern and investment for children in the classroom



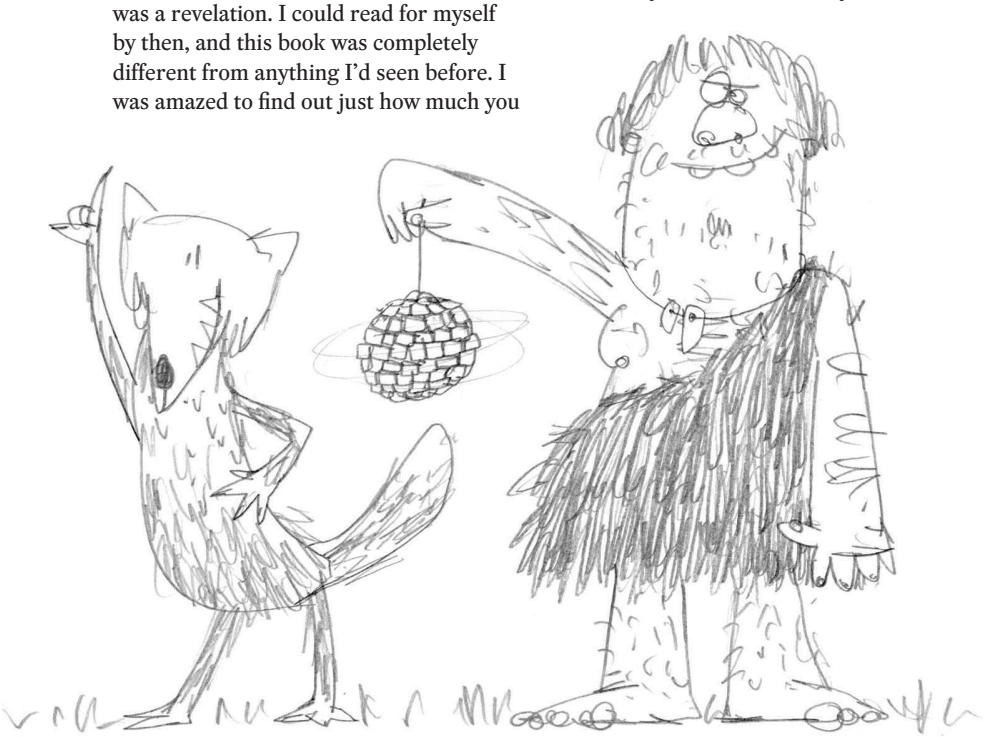
"Great villains are engines for stories"

Characters who break the rules in books allow readers of all ages to reconsider their own boundaries, says **Andy Stanton**

Thinking back to my relationship with reading as a kid, I remember it in so many ways. For example, when I was very small I used to ask my mum to read me the *Mr Men* books every night.That's not so unusual, I suppose; but I also used to make her test me on the names of all the characters on the back, in order. I still have a much better memory for the names and faces of Mr Men than I do for those of real people.

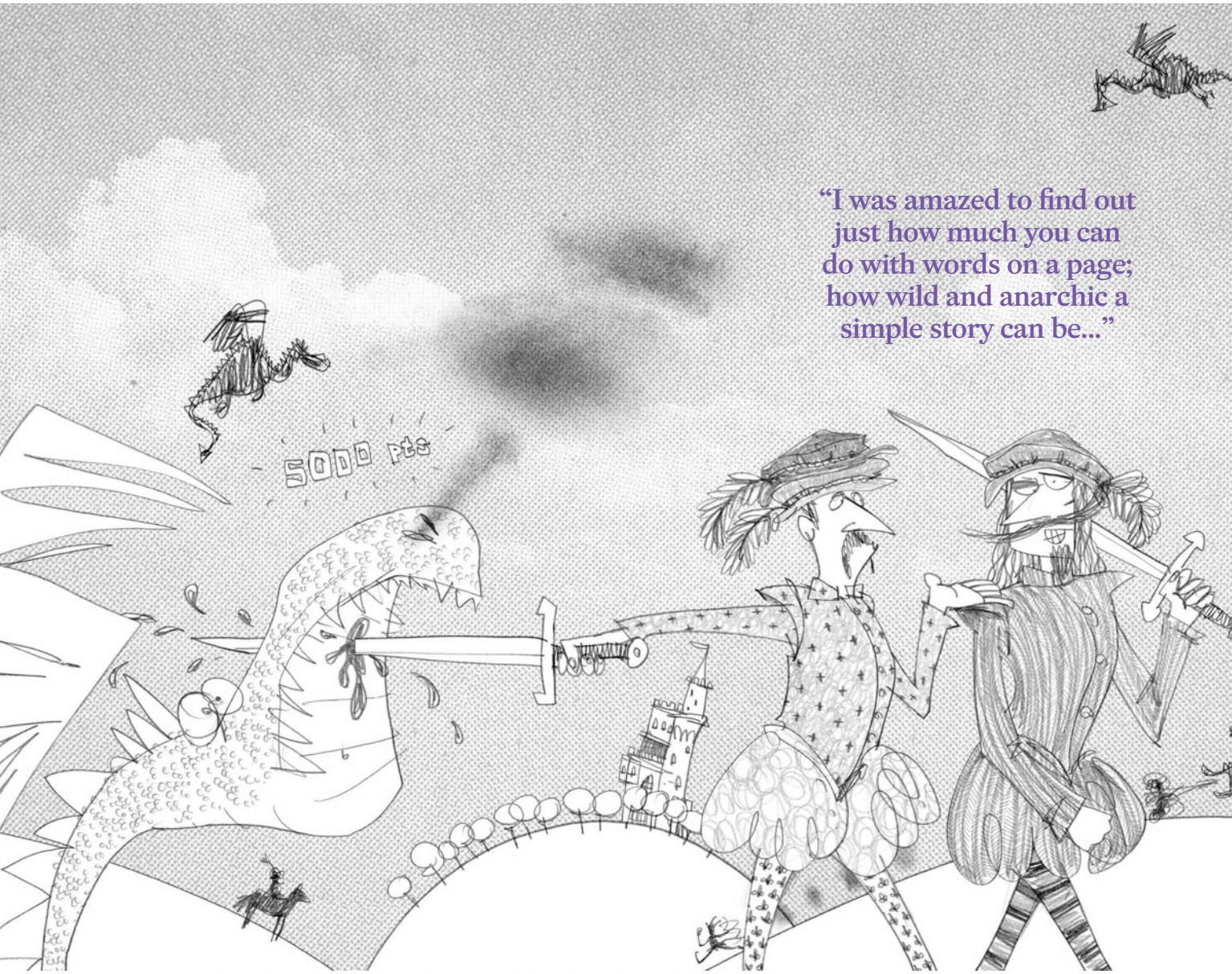
Stumbling across *The Cat in the Hat* at primary school, when I was about five, was a revelation. I could read for myself by then, and this book was completely different from anything I'd seen before. I was amazed to find out just how much you can do with words on a page; how wild and anarchic a simple story can be. It's not all so positive, though – I also recall, a couple of years later, a 'lesson' that involved the whole class being told to read for 15 minutes, then to stop and count up the number of words we'd read in that time. I never got to the end of counting; maybe it was a maths teacher trying to crowbar her subject into a literacy session? In any case, I think it must be one of the most pointless things I've ever had to do.

I always had a book with me as a kid. And in my memories, I clearly connect specific books with different situations. So, I know that when I visited my grandma in hospital, I was reading one of Enid Blyton's *Five Find Outers and Dog* mysteries; I have a real soft spot for Enid Blyton (although you can keep *The Secret Seven*, thanks). And I will never forget sitting at our kitchen table devouring Betsy Byars' brilliant *The Eighteenth Emergency* for the first time. I'd taken it out of the library because it looked interesting, with its Quentin Blake illustration on the cover – and I've loved it ever since. I relish how melancholy and bittersweet it is, and also, how it is such a small story; proof that you don't need to put the end of the world into a book to make it exciting.



I was one of those bright, cheeky kids – a kind of Bart Simpson character – and I was always coming up with really, really stupid stories. Some teachers told me to rein it in a bit, others encouraged me; but it was Miss Yates who taught me how to understand when surrealism is going too far, and always to put real emotions in there as well. It was my first important lesson about good writing.

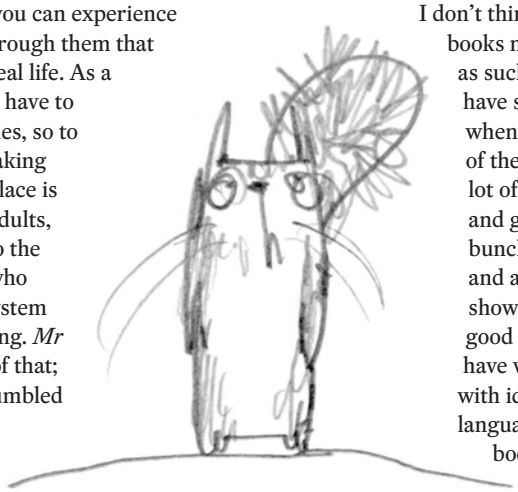
Mr Gum came out of my frustration at never actually finishing any of the ideas I was always having. One Christmas Eve, I just sat down to see if I could write a complete story, to read to my cousins on Christmas Day. I put a floppy disc into the computer (which tells you how long ago this was), and there was a paragraph on it about an old man terrorising a dog. "That's as good a starting point as any," I thought – and I wrote the first Mr Gum story, in full, that night. I read it to my cousins next day... and then promptly



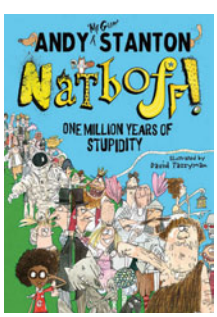
"I was amazed to find out just how much you can do with words on a page; how wild and anarchic a simple story can be..."

forgot about it, until two years later, when I gave it a couple of edits and sent it off to some agents.

Everyone likes a 'bad' character; I think it's because you can experience stuff vicariously through them that isn't an option in real life. As a kid, especially, you have to live by a load of rules, so to have someone breaking them all over the place is thrilling – and as adults, we're still drawn to the 'maverick' figure who goes outside the system to achieve something. *Mr Gum* taps into all of that; it's something I stumbled across by accident, but now I tell children all the time: a great way to start a story is to come up with a villain, because then something will definitely happen. Great villains are engines for stories.



I don't think all children's books need a 'message', as such; but I do have secret agendas when I write. One of them is to put a lot of good heart and good will into a bunch of stupidity, and another is to show kids what a good time you can have when you play with ideas and with language. My new book is written in about 15 or 16 different voices – it's a collection of daft short stories set in different historical periods, but with all the action happening in Lamonic Bibber, the home of Mr Gum. I'm really excited about it, because it will challenge my readers in a way they haven't been challenged before... or at least, not by me.



***Natboff! – One Million Years of Stupidity* by Andy Stanton will be published by Egmont from May 31st, 2018**

WHY DON'T THEY JUST **get on with it?**

Creating a class of independent readers isn't about giving children books and time to read them. A little structure goes a long way, says **Nikki Gamble**

'There's nothing to read!' Stanley has been in the book corner for 15 minutes, flicking aimlessly through the unappealing collection of worn, unloved books that are crammed on the shelf.

Class teacher, Alex, is in his second year of teaching, working in Year 5. He is taking part in an action research project with a focus on independent reading and I have been invited into school to observe the daily Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) session. "We've ring-fenced 20 minutes a day in which children can select which books they want to read," Alex explains. "They can choose from books in the reading corner or books from home - it's working for some of the class, but there are too many children like Stanley who seem to spend forever choosing books and not actually reading."

Planning the way forward

Having taken time to review the existing provision, Alex and I come up with a list of actions:

- First, there needs to be a wider range of books in order to appeal to the varied interests and reading levels of the children.
- There should be attractive displays that will invite children to pick up books and read them. While there isn't much space in Alex's classroom, we reserve the top book shelf for a face-out display of a few selected books, together with some teaser recommendations.
- Space will be created where children can display their responses to the books they've read.
- Alex will provide more opportunities for peer-to-peer recommendations, including loosely structured book talk sessions. We decide this needs to be child-led and allow for spontaneous recommendation, rather than the 'let's all write a book review' approach.
- A structured beginning and end will be introduced to the DEAR sessions, giving greater value and explicit purpose to the activity.
- Lastly, and importantly, there will be a weekly teacher-led discussion – independent reading doesn't just mean leaving the children to get on with it.

Choosing a theme

We also decide to introduce a reading theme for a term, which will provide a focus for comparison and discussion and still allow children to read a range of books. As Alex will have read all the books we are selecting, he will be able to manage well-informed discussions - previously, he admits, he hadn't really thought about the role he might have during independent reading time, other than reading his own book. Though children can choose books that fit with the theme, they're still free to select other books from the class book shelf, or read books from home as usual, if they prefer.

The theme we choose for the first term is *We Can be Heroes*, which crosses genres and includes fiction, picturebook and non-fiction titles - giving it a much better chance of suiting different reading tastes and interests.

We have selected eight different books, but importantly there are three copies of each available (24 books in total): we want to encourage sharing, informal book talk and peer-to-peer recommendation and we

anticipate this will help to generate the book buzz we are aiming for. We have been careful to include one accessible and one challenging text to ensure everyone is able to participate.

The final list includes: David Long, *Survivors*; Frank Cottrell Boyce, *Astounding Broccoli Boy*; Kieran Larwood, *Podkin One Ear*; Katherine Rundell, *The Explorer*; Phil Earle, *Superdad's Day Off*; Mike Revell, *Stormwalker*; Stewart Foster, *Bubble Boy* and Suana Verelst, *Razia's Ray of Hope*.

Introducing the books

Before the books are revealed, Alex discusses the qualities of a hero with the class, covering both real life and fictional examples – from superheroes to ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Pictures of some of the heroes the children mention are displayed in the book corner and they are invited to add to the display.

Working in pairs, pupils then complete a diamond 9 activity using a set of nine cards, each bearing a quality a hero might possess: imaginative, adventurous, selfless, ambitious, fearless, courageous, caring, patient, resilient. Children are asked to arrange the cards in a diamond shape, placing them in order of importance. Having done this, they form groups of four to share ideas and justify their choices.

Only after the discussions have finished are the eight books introduced. This is done by typing up the blurbs on the back jackets, then placing these in separate envelopes. Volunteers are chosen to open the envelopes, read the blurb and then match it to one of the book covers, which are displayed at the front of the class.

> **"The theme we choose for the first term is *We Can be Heroes*, which crosses genres and includes fiction, picturebook and non-fiction titles"**

Finally, all the books are placed in the book corner where children can choose them for independent reading. In the first DEAR session following the introduction, all 24 books are selected and a waiting list is displayed to which children can add their names.

Changing the culture

Throughout the term, Alex leads regular book talk sessions in which children are invited to pool their collective knowledge from the different books they're reading. They consider the difference between superheroes, heroes in classic literature and everyday heroes, using 'double bubble' graphic organisers to make comparisons. They find quotations from different books to support their ideas and these too are displayed in the book corner.

As the discussions progress, children start to think more broadly and more deeply, seeking out new books to fit with the heroic theme; Alex becomes excited by the new class dynamic. He tells me about how the children talk informally about books in the playground, and in the morning as they come into class. A lot of book swapping is happening too.

Independent readers

At the end of term, I make another visit to observe DEAR. The atmosphere is transformed. "I think whole class discussion is one of the most important things," Alex muses. Choosing a theme, it seems, has had the desired effect and children are making more connections in their reading; it's also helped create a community of readers while allowing for individual preferences. Adding some structure to the format has lent support to less confident children and the displays have become more meaningful. Overall there's a lot more child-led activity - it's now less about creating beautiful installations and more about finding ways to support children's independence. "So, what's next," I ask.

"Well. I've thought of another great theme…"

NIKKI GAMBLE is CEO at Just Imagine: Centre for Excellence in Reading. She is author of *Exploring Children's Literature* and co-author of *Guiding Readers: layers of meaning.*

"Harry Potter completely changed my life"

McFly songwriter **Tom Fletcher** credits J.K. Rowling with kick-starting his parallel career as a children's author...

One of my earliest memories is being at school, in a nursery class, looking at the alphabet display around the top of the walls and learning the letters. By that point, though, books were already a huge part of my life – my parents read to me all the time, and my dad would make up stories, about a dragon who lived on Mount Snowdon (which was bizarrely specific, now I think about it), and a little boy. Later, when my sister arrived on the scene, a little girl was added to the narrative.

Dr Seuss was a particular favourite, for all of us – so engaging, fascinating and fun; I don't know of any other series of books that uses words in such a skilful, playful way. That said, interestingly, another favourite for me was *The Snowman*, which has no words at all. I suppose the magic there was the way my mum or dad would bring the story to life. Our home was always full of storytelling and imagination.

When I got to primary school, the academic side wasn't a problem – but fitting in was, and I was bullied a bit. I wasn't into the stereotypical 'boy' stuff, like sports – I enjoyed singing, dancing, playing the guitar and performing. I was quite a sensitive kid, I suppose, and very teary, which must have made life quite difficult for my parents. I used to spend lunchtimes sitting with the teachers, because I couldn't handle the playground.

At the age of 11, though, I started at the Sylvia Young Theatre School, and for the first time, it felt like I was being taught by people who genuinely 'got' me. One in particular, Ray Lamb, was a huge influence. He was one of those educators who would always teach you more than you thought you were going to learn, somehow managing to weave science, engineering and motorcycle maintenance into a singing lesson, effortlessly. You didn't mess around with him – you didn't want to; he was teaching you so much.

I did read independently as a child, but I wouldn't say I actively got pleasure out of it, really. By the age of nine I'd started acting professionally, and that was my life – I loved it. So I would be reading scripts, or texts for research, but not for its own sake.

> "For the first time, I got completely lost in a book – I wanted to live in that world, and I couldn't wait for the next installment in the series... "

Then, when I was about 13, the first Harry Potter came out – and it changed my life. For the first time, I got completely lost in a book – I wanted to live in that world, and I couldn't wait for the next installment in the series. When *Deathly Hallows* was due to be released, McFly were at the height of our career; we played a sold-out gig at the Manchester Arena, then after the show I put on a hooded coat and queued with all the other Rowling fans outside the store where I'd preordered the book, before taking it straight back to the hotel to get started on it... talk about rock and roll!

Writing, on the other hand, is something that I've always enjoyed; stories, shows, songs, screenplays – it's just always felt natural to me to write down my ideas. And when you're in a band and touring, there is so much down time in hotel rooms that you have to find ways to occupy yourself; that's pretty much why I started writing children's books in the first place.

My stories are silly on the surface, but they deal with really serious issues, too. That's just how I write – and actually, also what I like to read. In *The Christmasaurus* there's the death of a parent, as well as bullying and disability, for example. And I think that's fine; we should talk about those issues with kids, and in my experience even very young children can absolutely cope with having the silly and the serious in a single narrative (although I suspect their parents sometimes struggle with the concept).

My own boys are still very young, although the older of them, who is three and a half, is already starting to recognise words and even write them, which is an amazing and fascinating experience as a parent. We share reading and stories with them all the time, and my hope for them is that one day they can fall in love with a book, like I did with *Harry Potter*; a book that transforms their life, opens their eyes, and takes them to a different universe. Nothing can do that like a book, because it requires your own imagination to make it happen – and that's an incredible, powerful, inspiring thing. It makes you want to create something of your own.

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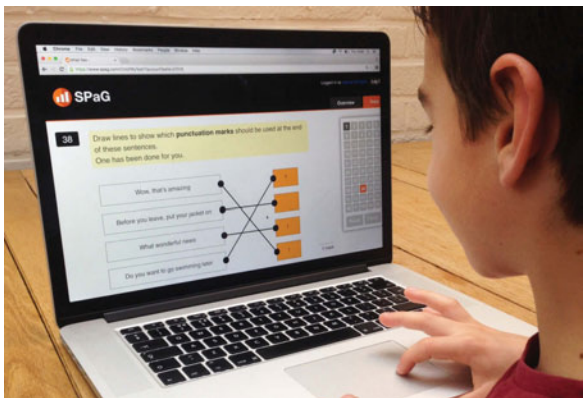

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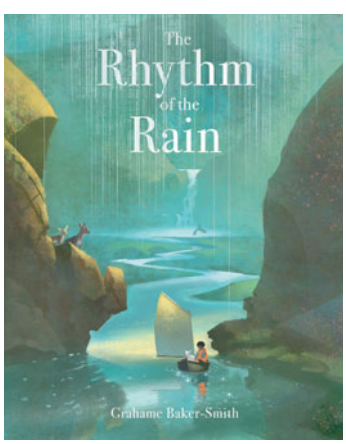

The Rhythm of the Rain, by Grahame Baker-Smith, is published by Templar (£12.99)

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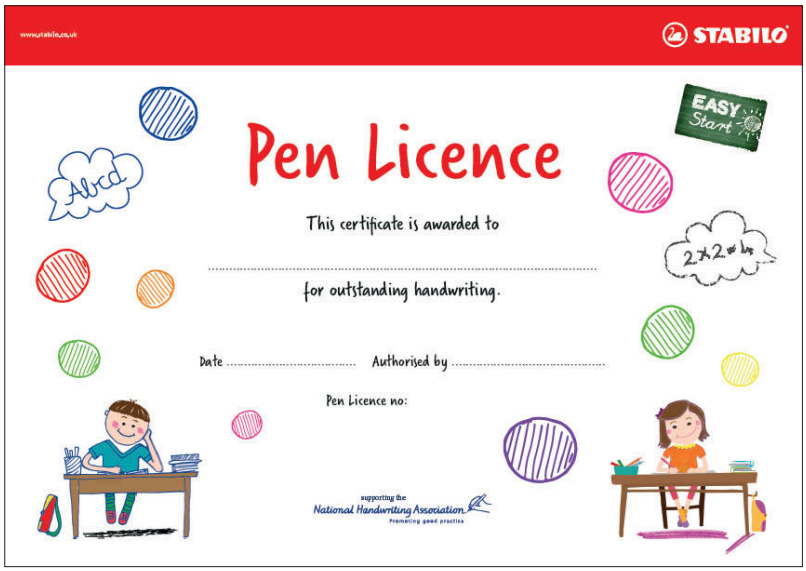

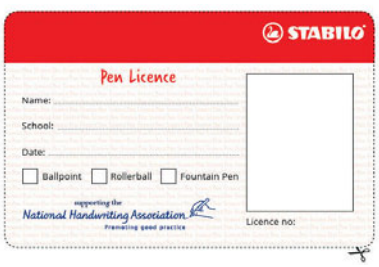

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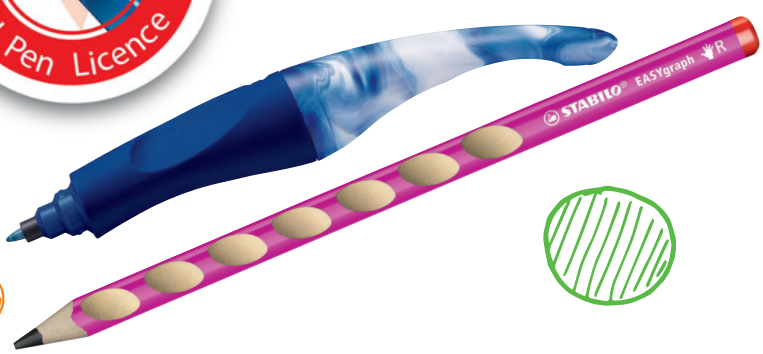

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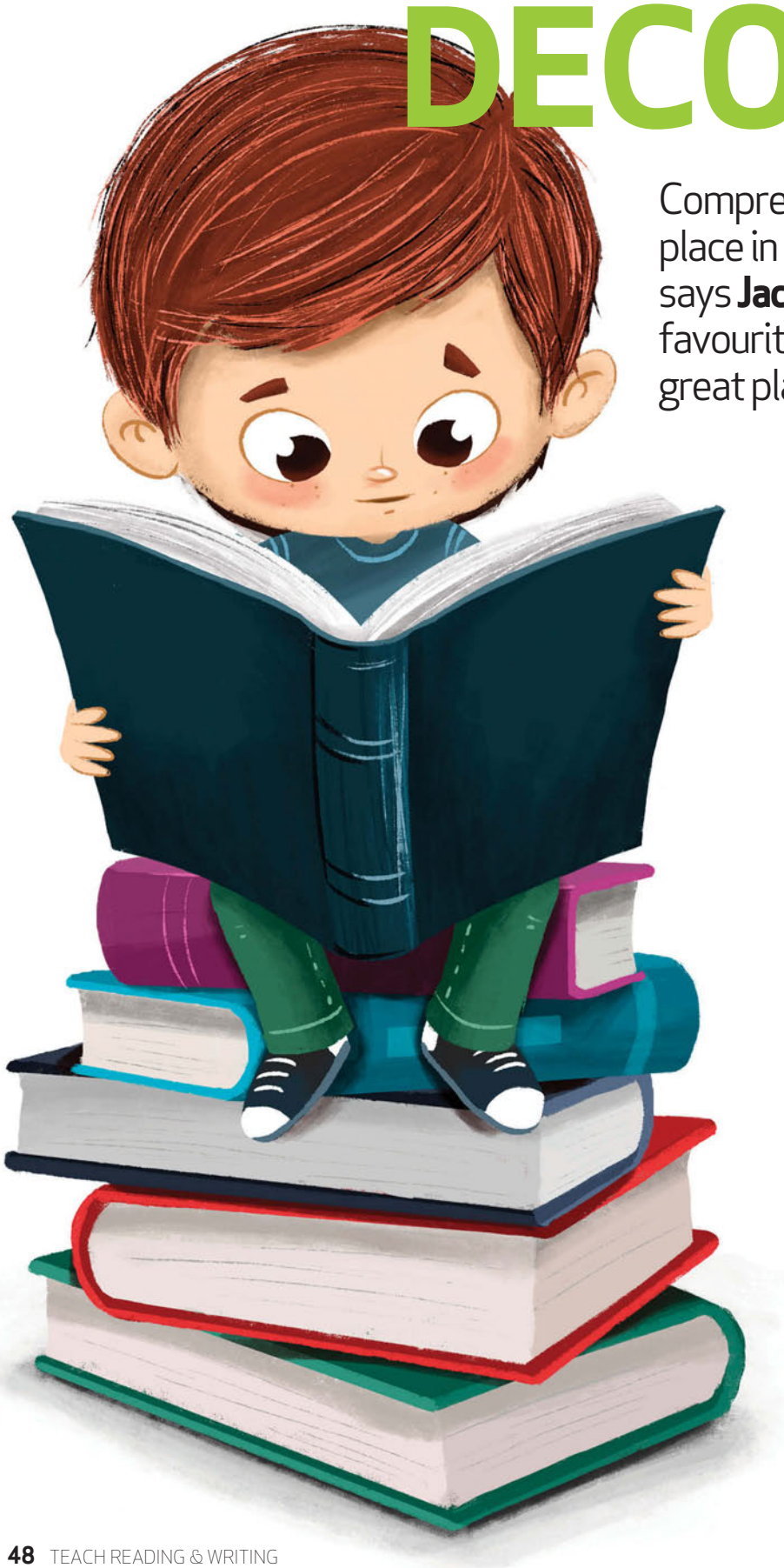

Comprehension has an essential place in your phonics lessons, says **Jacqueline Harris**, and your favourite picture books are a great place to start

I wholeheartedly approve of systematic phonics teaching, but what with scrutiny from Ofsted and the Y1 check, the focus often shifts almost entirely onto decoding, rather than teaching children to read – when it really should be a balance between the two.

I am, for example, a good decoder in Spanish as I studied it for a year at school. I know the correct pronunciations, but I am not a Spanish reader as I can only make sense of very few words. And my decoding skills are useless without comprehension.

If teaching children phonics is all about giving them the tools for reading, it seems to me that lessons need to focus on comprehension as well as decoding. This is why I use the application section of the lesson to make sure children truly apply their knowledge – that they are able to understand, as well as decode, what they are reading.

In my cautious early days of teaching phonics, I used the sentences in Letters and Sounds – that is until the day Thomas piped up with "But why are we reading such silly things?" when being asked to read 'Are fingers as long as arms?'.

He was right, I realised. Why would anyone be interesting in reading that? So I started to use my own sentences for the apply section of the lesson.

Choosing the right books

I began by making the sentences more interactive. I gave children a collection of pictures and a selection of sentences, each of which matched one of the images. There would, however, always be one picture without a matching sentence, but the children

had to read and understand all the sentences to discover which one.

Then, when I was teaching /ar/, I realised I knew a good book, Ruth Brown's *Dark, Dark Tale*, that featured this Phase 3 sound, and I could use that instead. I wrote my own version, making sure I used only decodable words with graphemes the children already knew. 'On a dark, dark night in a dark, dark wood was a dark, dark oak. In the dark, dark oak was a ...' This was instantly more exciting and successful in motivating them to read, particularly as I projected one of the beautiful illustrations onto the whiteboard. Then, having read aloud the original book, we enjoyed talking about what the surprise ending might be in the version I had written.

Some educators think you should not use books unless they have been written specifically for phonics teaching; but I believe any great picture book can be used, so long as the story is rewritten in decodable chunks. It takes very little time as you are only looking for a couple of sentences to be read independently, and some books can provide greater challenge for more able pupils.

There are a limited number of words for the /z/ /zz/ phoneme (Phase 3), but there is a wonderful, memorable book to support this. *Ben's Trumpet* by Rachel Isadora is set in 1920's jazz era. The marvellous black and white illustrations tell the story of Ben whose favourite place is the Zig Zag Jazz Club.

Start off the lesson by listening to jazz – it's likely that many children will not yet have encountered the word. Then, when it comes to the apply section, you can just edit the book's opening: 'Bens sits next to The Zig Zag Jazz Club'.

This book rightly won awards and when using the story as part of a phonics session I've found it has far more impact than just reading the example from Letters and Sounds – 'He did the zip up on Zenat's jacket'.

JACQUELINE HARRIS (@phonicsandbooks) is a literacy consultant and passionate advocate of high-quality children's literature

STORIES FOR EVERY PHASE

After trying this method of making the apply section of the lesson more meaningful and enjoyable, I began to collect books to use for all the phases.

PHASE 2

It's trickier to find books at this level as the language tends to involve more than just simple CVC words, but there are some good options, including *Duck in a truck*. 'Duck has no luck, he is stuck.' It's not as good as Jez Alborough's original rhyming text, I'll admit, but it works well for /ck/. 'Stuck' is technically a Phase 4 word as it has adjacent consonants, but most children have no problem decoding it in their enthusiasm to read the story, and there are no new graphemes to untangle.

PHASE 3

There's no shortage of choice here. As well as *The Dark Dark Tale*, an obvious choice would be *Shark in the Park* (or *Shark in the Dark*) by Nick Sharrett.

Pig in the Pond by Martin Waddell is another lovely book and some of the pages require very little editing. This works well once children have begun digraphs and need a bit of revision of the early ones. 'The pig sat in the sun. She looked at the pond. The ducks went "Quack!" The geese went "honk!"'.

PHASE 4

Here things get a bit harder once again due to the increasing complexity of texts, but there are options that highlight adjacent consonants well and help children revise previously learnt graphemes.

Mr Gumpy's Outing by John Burningham, for instance, is one of those clever books where each word has been chosen with great care, even though at first glance it appears quite simple. It really lends itself to comprehension. "The goat kicked, the chickens flapped, the pig mucked about…" There's a good conversation to be had about the way the word 'mucked' is used in that sentence!

PHASE 5

This is a return to easier ground. There are dozens of options, with *The Smartest Giant in Town* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler being one of my favourites, and useful for assessment – you can be sure that any child who is able to read the letter at the end of the book has a very sound grasp of Phase 5.

Quentin Blake has written a couple of great books suitable for phonics teaching. *Mr Magnolia* is fantastic for exploring different ways of spelling the /oo/ phoneme (flute, newt, boot and suit) while *Fantastic Daisy Artichoke* provides lots of options for /oa/ (croak, stroke and folk).

Finally, if you are looking for a book that makes good use of nonsense words, Lynley Dodd's *The Dudgeon* is coming is a good example. Alongside the Dudgeon, other characters have unconventional names that require decoding skills, e.g. The Bombazine Bear and the Purple Kazoo.

The most important thing to remember when using books is not to give children 'extractitis' and always make sure you read and enjoy the whole book together. After all, that is the point of learning phonics!

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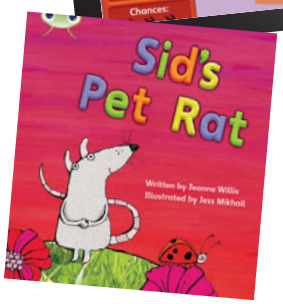

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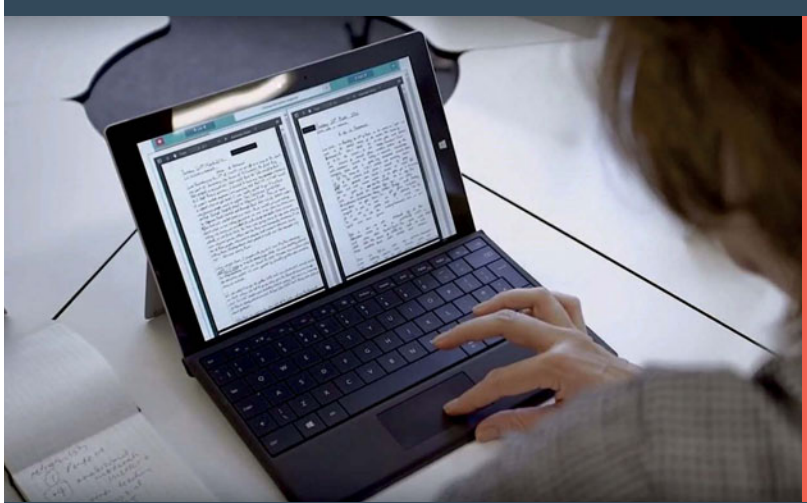

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Book topic
KS1

Leaf

This beautiful picture book by Sandra Dieckmann makes a compelling focus for KS1 activities

Published by Flying Eye Books, 2017

Washed in by the tide, a polar bear arrives on the shores of a northern forest and settles in an abandoned cave. The animals who live nearby are frightened of the stranger. They call him Leaf, because of his habit of collecting plants, but nobody is brave enough to speak to him – until the bear makes a pair of leafy wings and tries to fly. He fails, of course, but at last the others listen to his tale of separation, misery and loneliness.

"We'll help you," say the crows. And they do – by flying him through the clouds and straight back home to Mum and Dad.

This beautiful picture book has plenty of heart - but there's bite here, too, beneath the decorative surface. It's an original story, not a retelling, but feels grounded in a way that adds genuine heft to Dieckmann's rich and satisfying artwork. Leaf has been informed and shaped by northern folk traditions: not only in its use of colour and the patterns that enhance its pages, but also in the darker aspects of the story – Leaf's separation from home and family, the threat of environmental imbalance and the mistrust of the 'other' that is so evident throughout.

Handsomely produced by Flying Eye – who are relative newcomers themselves – this is a book that appeals across a wide age range and makes a compelling focus for creative projects in the KS1 classroom.

How to share the book

Before showing the children this book, show them a globe. Where do we live? What's at the northern tip of our world, and who lives there? Pool what you know about the Arctic, collecting questions on a whiteboard. How can you find answers? Introduce a selection of books and online resources that you can explore later to learn more.

Show children the front cover. Who is this animal, and where is he? It's not an environment that's usually associated with polar bears! Use the globe to show where the northern forests are, and describe the trees and animals that live there. How did the bear come to be in the forest, do you think? Discuss your ideas and the questions you might want to ask the bear.

Read this book all the way through to enjoy the story and pictures before discussing. The artwork is intricate, so you might want to use a visualizer – or you could find some extra copies and recruit helpers to turn pages as you read, so that every child can see clearly.

Talk about the book – what you liked best, what surprised you, what you'll remember, what could have been improved. Why didn't the animals want to be friends with the bear? Track the crows throughout the story. What do they say and do to change things?

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

Multisensory writing hooks

For richer and more satisfying writing, explore key moments in the story using multisensory approaches. Look at the spread showing Leaf's paw sticking out of the water. This is when the crows decide to talk to him. Discuss what you can see and the questions this raises.

Touch some large, black feathers and view through magnifiers. What do you notice? Sketch using thick graphite and charcoal, then blow on the feathers to see what happens in the wind. What would it be like to wear a coat of feathers, do you think?

Fill a large bowl with water. Look closely at the surface. How does it move when you blow on it? Agitate the water to make little waves. How do they move? Make small splashes and notice how the water behaves. What does it sound like? Recreate using your voice and/or percussion instruments.

How has Dieckmann chosen to depict the northern sea? Investigate ways to draw and paint a seascape using different media (watercolour, pastels, wax crayons, etc). Share working methods and discoveries.

Ask children to use their voices to explore sounds that could be made by water, wind and birds, then choose their favourite to add to a communal soundscape. Conduct your orchestra, using signals to raise and lower the volume. Talk about what you've done and how it felt to take part. What can the bear hear in this picture, do you think?

Collect words to describe everything in this image: water, sky, feathers; flying, falling, splashing, swimming; how it feels to be a crow or bear. Set up whole-class wordbanks and use to tell stories about the bear falling in the water.

Now ask children to write about the moment shown in the picture. Encourage them to involve their readers by using vivid words, descriptions and ideas.

Odd one out

Stories about animals behaving like people can help children explore difficult emotions

BEAUTIFUL BOOKS

Flying Eye Books is a new imprint, but it has already established a reputation for the quality of its design and production. Books today have to compete with lots of other media, so making a picture book that's great to touch and hold, as well as look at, is important – and 'extras' like Leaf's printed cloth spine can make a big difference.

Let Leaf inspire you to create beautiful handmade books of your own. Online tutorials will teach you how to make a simple hardback book, or you can use single sheets of textured card and bind with washi tape (easy-to-use Japanese masking tape) to add Flying Eye style impact to your finished books.

To fill your book with good things, why not find out about the Arctic and the animals that live there, and write illustrated reports?

by creating distance and allowing them to be objective. In this book, a new arrival is ignored, discussed behind his back and judged, and this may resonate with children who are aware of the impact of unkindness and exclusion. Carefully-handled drama activities can be an effective way to develop thinking around such issues, as well as helping children improve their speaking, listening and other language skills.

Look at the first spread (the bear floating on the ice). How does the bear feel? How can you tell? As a class, collect words to describe him and his feelings. Copy the bear's posture, then find other ways to use your body to show sadness, loneliness and fear.

'It was unlike anything the animals… had seen before…'

Look at the second spread (the animals looking at the bear in his cave). What could the animals be saying and feeling? Working in groups of four to six, decide who will roleplay the bear and who the other animals. Create tableaux showing the animals ignoring the bear. Play 'Find my voice': tap a child's shoulder to hear their character's thoughts and feelings. On a given signal, bring your tableaux to life, allowing children to move, speak and show what happens next. Repeat, with different children as the bear. How did it feel to be excluded – or exclude? Deal sensitively with this if parallels are drawn with playground issues.

What could the animals have done to change things? Roleplay different outcomes and discuss. Build on the activity by writing about the meeting from different points of view.

Finding a voice

'Every day they discussed the stranger…' Initially, the animals refer to the Bear as 'it'. Eventually they call him Leaf – but as he hasn't said a word, we don't know who he is or why he's there. Look at the fourth spread. What are the animals saying about Leaf? Is it true? Talk about facts, opinions and rumours. How could the animals learn the truth?

> **Eventually they call him Leaf – but as he hasn't said a word, we don't know who he is or why he's there.**

Look at the seventh spread, showing the animals in the clearing. What are they saying? Have their ideas changed? Tip: pay attention to the crows!

Group children and give them one copy of *Leaf* per group, plus post-it notes. Look at each picture up to and including the seventh spread, and add dialogue or thoughts for different characters using post-it notes. Use one colour for the animals and another for the bear.

'They let him speak and at last they listened…'

Look at the spread showing the bear crawling out of the water. At last the crows are talking to him! What could Leaf be saying? Use post-its to add thoughts and dialogue to the remaining pages of the book.

Why is it important to listen? And how do we know when it's safe to talk to people we don't know?

CAREY FLUKER HUNT is creative projects manager at Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Loved this? Try these...

- *Ice Bear by Nicola Davies and Gary Blythe*
- *My Dad's a Bird Man by David Almond and Polly Dunbar*
- *The Last Polar Bears by Harry Horse*
- *Izzy Gizmo by Pip Jones and Sara Ogilvie*
- *The Ice Bear by Jackie Morris*

CLAY PLAY

■ Sandra Dieckmann is a ceramicist as well as a writer and illustrator. See her animal figurines at sandradieckmann.com/ceramics. Which do your children like best? Which animal would they choose to model, and why?

■ Examine Dieckmann's animal artwork in *Leaf* and compare with the ceramic busts on her website. Using plasticine or clay, model an animal head inspired by Dieckmann's work.

■ Look closely at the plants on the book cover – use magnifiers! – and talk about the shapes and colours you can see. Draw your own plants, copying Dieckmann's ideas and inventing new ones. Experiment with pastels, watercolour, coloured pencils, wax resist, scraperboard and other media.

■ Cut out your leaves and plants and stick on a sheet of card with a hole in the middle. Display so that your model animal can peep through the hole, surrounded by your forest plants.

■ Invent a name for your animal and tell the story of how he or she came to be living in the forest you've created, and what happened next.

MAKE WINGS

Using a template, cut some wings from card. Give each child a set, with plenty more available so that children can experiment. Supply equipment such as string, hole punchers, sellotape, staplers and scissors, plus a variety of different types and thicknesses of card and other materials. In pairs, ask children to find ways of attaching the wings to their back or arms. Encourage them to keep a record by drawing and adding notes as they work – including ideas that aren't successful, as well as those that are. Share and discuss frequently so that everyone can benefit. What works best, and why?

Once you've worked out how to construct them, ask children to make a finished set of wings that they can wear. Give your wings a 'Dieckmann' look by painting and drawing leaves, cutting them out and attaching to the card – or choose a different way to decorate (collage, wax resist, scrunched-up tissue).

Wear your wings. How does it feel? Take plenty of photos! Write descriptions of your wings and instructions on how to make them.

To take this further, retell the Greek legend of Icarus, look at Leonardo da Vinci's bird wing drawings or read *My Dad's a Bird Man* by David Almond and Polly Dunbar.

"I just write about the things that will amuse me"

When **Judith Kerr** invented a story for her daughter about an unexpected visitor, she didn't realise that people would still be sharing it fifty years later...

I learnt to read in German – which is much easier than English, with all its though/ought/bough silliness – and I did it very early, when I was around three or so. The world is full of writing, and every time I saw words on street signs, or advertisements, or whatever, I'd ask my mother what it said, and she would tell me, until I found I could do it for myself. It happens like that for some people, I think; a kind of osmosis. In Germany, children don't start school until they are six – and I remember being amazed at my poor classmates, who were having to be shown how to read.

Of course, things were very different in those days; there was no radio, and certainly no TV – so if you wanted stories, you *had* to read. I find it interesting how some people now talk about 'screen time' for children in a way that's not unlike how reading was often seen back then. "He's always got his nose in a book!" was a dismissive comment, indicating that someone was avoiding interaction with the real world, which was A Bad Thing. Books were an escape, yes – and an indulgence. To finish your homework and retire to some private place with a story, and perhaps a bag of sweets... well, it was wonderful. And sometimes, a huge comfort, especially when the war started. Everyone had paperbacks then; you never knew when you might be stuck on a train for hours because of a bomb on the lines.

My family fled Germany before the war, in 1933, going first to Switzerland, then to Paris. And all the time, I read; that's how you learn new languages. At first, I only used to seek out fairy tales; I didn't want anything more real than that. Later on I enjoyed *Heidi*, although it troubled me that the author also wrote a lot of books in which children, especially good ones, were rather apt to die. It's not that I thought I was a particularly suitable candidate for such a fate - but after all, mistakes do get made! I loved *Tom Sawyer*, and thought the way it opened, diving straight into the story with no, 'Once upon a time...' was splendid; and I also recall reading an abbreviated version of *Oliver Twist*. I was keen on school stories, too – they'd been few and far between in Germany, but I managed to get hold of some Angela Brazil novels in English when we were in France, working my way through them with the help of a dictionary. I caused a certain amount of surprise, I believe, when I arrived in London cheerfully describing things with my distinctive accent as 'ripping' and 'smashing'.

It's been fifty years since my first book, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, was published – although in fact, I'd come up with the story six years earlier, for my daughter Tacy, who was not quite three at the time. We'd seen tigers at the zoo, and she'd been awestruck by them – as children are, generally, I suspect. She saw them as beautiful creatures, not frightening or aggressive. My husband [screenwriter Nigel Kneale], who usually worked at home, was away at the filming of *The Entertainer*, and Tacy and I were a bit bored, and lonely, and wished that somebody would come and visit. And that's how it all started.

There really is no subtext, or at least not one I'm aware of. Michael Rosen – whom I love dearly – has suggested that the tiger might represent the Gestapo; but we left Germany before all that started, and anyway, I draw the little girl snuggling the animal in one of the pictures, which doesn't support that theory very well! Michael knows I don't agree with him, but everyone is entitled to an opinion; besides, I think he's done me a lot of good – after all, as long as people keep on discussing the book, it will keep on getting read.

I knew nothing about children when I had mine, but it always seemed to me that the best way to persuade them to do things would be to make them laugh. When he was learning to read, our son Matthew had *Janet and John* books; but after a while he said, very formally, "Mummy, I cannot read these boring books any more. I am going to learn from *The Cat in the Hat* instead." And he did; Dr Seuss was a revelation – I was so impressed by the clever, playful way he used words that I tried a similar style for my *Mog* books. Although I do deal with serious, and sad, subjects, I mostly just write about things that amuse me, and that I think will amuse my readers. Half a century on, it still seems to work...

The Tiger Who Came to Tea 50th Anniversary Party Book will be available from June 2018 (£9.99, Harper Collins Children's Books)

Author photo: Eliz Huseyin; Illustration: Judith Kerr

"I was a bit bored, and lonely, and wished somebody would come and visit..."

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8 ways to use classics in your classroom

Bob Cox's ideas will help children of all abilities to engage with – and enjoy – more challenging texts

1 | Use as part of a quality curriculum
Plan for quality thinking, quality reading and quality writing throughout the primary curriculum. Aim for a balance of top class picture books, and challenging contemporary and classic children's fiction and literature; the right literature choices will stimulate deeper possibilities – as exemplified in pupils' work found at **tinyurl.com/odpupilwork**.

2 | Link classic extracts with modern texts
Extracts from long, famous novels originally written for adults tend to have the most impact on standards. Focused class study of dramatic scenes like the dog leaping from the mists in *Hound of the Baskervilles* or the wonder of the Catskill Mountains in *Rip Van Winkle* can deepen comprehension and inspire top class creative writing. Be sure to have contemporary texts on similar themes on the tables; selections can vary in readability but should link in genre or author.

3 | Poetry please!
Use the same 'link reading' and intertextuality approach to poetry. Flood your pupils with many poems from all eras, but use classic texts in detail to inspire your lessons – choosing from the work of someone like Emily Dickinson or Walter de la Mare. I have also had terrific response from teachers using Charlotte Mew's *The Call* and Christina Rossetti's *What is Pink?*

4 | Inspire mastery learning
Classic texts will give you the opportunity to go deeper. The richness of more complex texts is subtle. They often offer ambiguity, and a variety of styles and cultural or vocabulary barriers to unpick. This is an opportunity, not a threat. Choose texts which are harder than your pupils are used to and the chance is there to teach new concepts. And for those ready for greater depth reading and application, there is ample opportunity!

BOB COX
is an educational consultant, presenter and award winning writer of the 'Opening Doors' series, published by Crown House.

5 | Choose carefully
Just because something is an 'old favourite', that doesn't mean it will give you the depth you need for teaching English – even if it has been written specifically for children. There has to be appropriate content which hooks the imagination of your pupils; extracts from novels and classic poems need to be ones which open doors and can link with modern classics like *Varjak Paw* or *The Island at the End of Everything*.

6 | Consider cultural capital
If pupils don't hear about famous music, art and literature from us, they may not encounter it at all, or understand its roots when they do. Great literature gives pupils in every school in the country cultural capital and increases confidence, communication skills and love of learning. It's global too – so think wide as well as deep when you choose your texts.

7 | Get philosophical
If you get your choices right, you will find an extraordinary response from all abilities to the ghastly Miss Havisham or the strange presence in Charlotte Mew's *The Call*; while HG Wells' *First Men in the Moon* stimulates thinking about why mankind reaches for the stars. You can start with younger pupils: *Peter Pan*; *The Wizard of Oz*; poems by James Reeves. By the time they are in year 6 they will find formal 'unseens' much easier, as they will have had a diet of challenge and opportunity and debate.

8 | Be a reading teacher
For everyone, ongoing reading is knowledge acquisition and joy. Why not make it a habit to discover or rediscover some famous writers from the past for yourself, and link them with children's writers of today? There are links everywhere. You probably know *Lord of the Flies* but have you read *Where the World Ends* by Geraldine McCaughrean? It could become a modern classic. Keep reading and learning; for me, the older I get, the less I know!

@BobCox_SFE **searchingforexcellence.co.uk**

Does it matter if CHILDREN CAN'T READ?

Literacy is a critical first step for accessing a full curriculum, says **Jules Daulby** – but perhaps our definition of it is too narrow....

The Simple View of Reading clearly states that to read, a child must be able to 'decode and understand text'. For most youngsters, this expectation is met in KS1 – and learning to read soon evolves into reading to learn. But what if it doesn't happen? How do we label that child? Illiterate? Unable to decode? Unable to understand language? The distinctions are subtle but important. As an example, would you describe a blind pupil who cannot see words on the page as illiterate? If the same child listened to Harry Potter as an audio book, would you say they had read it?

For a learner with a visual impairment, the cause of an 'inability to read' is clear, and schools can support that pupil's progress through the use of technology, modified papers and possibly braille. When a child has a 'reading impairment', however, there is a tendency to assume that the 'fault' lies with the young person; the family; or even the teacher ('dysteachia' is an unsavoury term I've heard). And whatever the cause, the school's natural response comes in the form of an intervention, to 'cure' the emerging reader.

Supporting independence

A Hearing and Visual Support Service (HVSS) advises mainstream teachers on supporting children with visual and hearing impairments (VI). My lightbulb moment came when an advisory teacher explained how the teaching assistant for a youngster with VI might be in the classroom, but will rarely sit with the supported child. Instead, time would be spent removing barriers to allow the learner to work independently. Why, I wondered, was this not the approach we took in the Special Educational Needs Specialist Service (SENSS), for students with dyslexia?

If a child can comprehend but not decode, I asked myself, isn't this like a VI learner? If they are accessing texts, and understanding them – albeit with their ears rather than their eyes – then surely, they are reading? Therefore, should we not be enabling such pupils to access text alongside our quest to solve the problem of their apparent lack of literacy? When they are not in intervention, what is school doing to ensure these learners can access the curriculum and record their knowledge (for it is likely if they cannot read, they will be unable to write either)? Is technology provided and are resources modified, in the same way as such adjustments are made for a child who cannot see?

> "If pupils are accessing texts, and understanding them – albeit with their ears rather than their eyes – then surely, they are reading?"

I know two students personally for whom technology has significantly reduced the negative impact of an inability to decode text and record knowledge. One was unable to write to a standard commensurate with his understanding. It was picked up at an early age, and from around Year 5, he used Dragon Naturally Speaking at school. Still unable to transcribe with his pen, he now uses speech recognition for all his work, achieved a first class undergraduate degree, and is currently applying for a PhD. Archie also has dyslexia – but although he was offered technology to support him towards his degree, it came too late, with inadequate training, and he struggled. Rather than using the software to enable his studying, Archie was learning how to use the technology. If he'd had it earlier, life at university would not have been so difficult for him.

The bigger picture

Does it matter if children can read? I would say yes, absolutely – but let's be more flexible about what we perceive to be 'reading', and question more rigorously what a child who cannot read within the typical timeframe is doing in the classroom when they are not in an intervention. For example, a pupil who cannot decode is likely to fall further behind their peers as the vocabulary gap increases (the so-called Matthew Effect, through which the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer). If, however, challenging words are routinely read out loud, and text to speech technology and audio books are used, access to high-level language can be opened to all, regardless of decoding ability.

The correlation between spending time in prison and a lack of literacy skills is often quoted by the DfE as a reason why we urgently need to teach children to read, as though this might be a panacea. However, research shows that when you compare similar sectors of society, literacy rates are no lower for those who have been incarcerated than they are more generally, suggesting that it is poverty, not literacy, that is the real link. There is also a correlation between being male and the prison population – yet we don't try to feminise boys in a vain attempt at keeping them out of jail. Looking at the bigger

picture is vital, and considering options like scribes can really help unlock what children are thinking.

And certainly, it can be the pattern that a language difficulty in KS1 may become a literacy difficulty in KS2, and a behaviour difficulty in KS3 – but it is the *language* that holds the key: *"literacy is parasitic upon language"* (Snowling & Hulme, 2012).

Those with a reading difficulty either in lifting words off the page or understanding them once decoded will require further support. But for a child who simply cannot decode (yet?), a computer could do this for them. Alongside phonic intervention for half an hour a day, text to speech technology could help narrow the vocabulary and attainment gaps, enabling independent access to the full curriculum – and ultimately, academic achievement reflective of the pupil's true potential.

JULES DAULBY is director of education for Driver Youth Trust, a charity enabling schools to support children with literacy difficulties.

BEYOND INTERVENTION

The following tech can support pupils who struggle to decode and record knowledge throughout their learning:

FREE TECH

- **IMMERSIVE READER (onenote.com/learningtools)**
  This has many functions, including reading aloud.
- **READ ALOUD (tinyurl.com/trwreadaloud)**
  Allows any text to be read out loud across a range of Microsoft solutions, including Word 2016.
- **SPEECH RECOGNITION**
  Available for Windows (tinyurl.com/trwwindowsspeech) or in Google (tinyurl.com/trwgooglespeech) – a headset would be required.
- **MOBILE DEVICES**
  Accessibility features in smartphones and tablets will always have a 'speak' function (tinyurl.com/trwphonespeech), which can be turned on to hear text played.
- **RNIB BOOKSHARE (rnibbookshare.org/cms)**
  Provides free electronic versions of texts a school owns if pupils have a print-disability such as dyslexia or are partially sighted. Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org) also provides many free, electronic books.
- **AUDIO BOOKS**
  Free from the library.

TECH TO PURCHASE

- **CLICKER 7 (cricksoft.com/uk/clicker)**
  This is a literacy word processing package which helps pupils plan, read text and write. Functions include predictive text, read aloud and an advanced spell checker.
- **READ&WRITE (texthelp.com/en-gb)**
  From hearing emails or documents read out loud to text prediction, picture dictionaries and summary highlighters, Texthelp's comprehensive, intuitive and discreet software solution makes countless everyday literacy tasks simpler, quicker and more accurate.
- **AUDIBLE (tinyurl.com/trwaudible)**
  A paid-for service which has many books in audio.

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"But I've FINISHED!"

Getting children to rewrite their work is a hard sell, but perhaps there's another way to help them put feedback into practice, suggests **James Clements...**

Learning to write is a tricky business. Crafting a great piece of writing means juggling many different elements: an awareness of audience and purpose; marshalling your ideas; structuring those ideas across a text; arranging the right words and phrases to communicate what you want to say clearly; and that's before punctuation, spelling and handwriting are thrown into the mix. Is it any wonder that children don't get everything right first time round?

In theory, the way to help children develop as writers is simple. After some input, they produce a draft piece of writing. Then we give them some feedback (possibly oral, possibly written) about how to improve their work. At this point they have the chance to act on our advice, either by editing or redrafting. Certainly this is the theory behind the plan-draft-evaluate-redraft writing process championed by the 2014 National Curriculum.

However, anyone who ever met a child will know that real life can be decidedly trickier than the theory. It is a universal truth of primary education that when it comes to teaching writing, encouraging children to redraft their work can be a hard sell. For every child keen to make changes to their piece of writing, they'll be another who will pipe up with the incredulous "But, I've finished" or "I've looked at it and there are no mistakes". For every child who works hard to hone their writing like a craftsman, there's another who will make changes, but ones that actually make their writing worse.

One way to help children learn to act on feedback is to give them a very similar writing task to the one they have just done, rather than ask them to edit or redraft. This gives them the chance to demonstrate what they've learnt from feedback, without having to rewrite the same piece again. Here's how this might work in practice.

How it works with letters

Class 6M are studying *The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane. In order to show their understanding of the story and to practise writing in character, they are asked to write a letter from the protagonist Henry Fleming back to his mother at home, describing his experiences fighting in the American War of Independence.

Once the children have finished, several of their letters are projected onto the whiteboard and the class works together to consider how they might be improved and developed. The children are given an opportunity to edit their work based on the lesson, before their writing is collected in for detailed written feedback from the teacher.

Next, the children could redraft their letter in the light of the marking, but following the 'write-reflect-write another model', children are then given the choice of writing a new letter from Henry set later in the story, or from another soldier to their family back home. This gives pupils the opportunity to use feedback from

the first letter to inform their next piece. Everyone in 6M is given something to work on. Ali's target is to use more descriptive language to try and paint a vivid picture of the battles. Sam is asked to vary the sentence structure across the piece so that each sentence doesn't begin with 'and then'. The children are free to reuse the best parts of their first letter, but they must meet their given target.

Correspondence, whether formal letters, emails, notes or messages, can give children a great context for writing several similar pieces in quick succession. For example, children might write a letter from one character to another and then write a reply or two letters with a similar purpose (complaining about graffiti and litter, for example) for a similar audience (to the town council or the local MP, perhaps).

Why diaries work well

Niamh and her Y1 classmates have been reading *This is Not My Hat* by Jon Klassen. After reading the story together, talking about it and acting it out, they are going to write a diary entry for the big fish who has his hat stolen. Pictures from the book are displayed around the classroom to remind them of the story.

Niamh writes a wonderfully detailed diary page, but she struggles to stay in the first person as she writes, drifting to the third-person narrator that is more common in story writing. Her diary begins with 'I woke up and my hat was gone', but soon she is writing about what happened to the fish ('then he went to look for it'). Her teacher sits with her and helps her to see the difference between these two voices.

Then Niamh has some time to write a page of another character's diary, the eyewitness crab, explaining what he saw. Her focus is to write in the first-person as if she is the crab. She manages this brilliantly and is very proud when she is chosen to read her diary entry out to the class.

Diaries can be an excellent stimulus for children's writing - either a personal diary based on real events, or one like Niamh's, written in character, with another diary entry following along and providing an opportunity to address any misconceptions straightaway.

JAMES CLEMENTS (@MrJClements) is an education writer, researcher and former teacher.

We should still redraft

Of course, it may be that sometimes redrafting the original piece of writing, rather than writing another similar piece, is exactly what is needed. It might be that the redrafting process itself is the learning focus: learning to work on a piece of writing, crafting it so it communicates exactly what we want to say is a skill that is worth developing. Or it might be that the original piece didn't do what it was intended to do or perhaps the feedback is very specific to that piece.

Redrafting is still an important skill, and 'write-reflect-write another' shouldn't simply replace it. Instead, it gives another opportunity for children to act on advice. Clear feedback, delivered at the right point in the writing process, and then the chance to act on it can be one of the most effective ways of helping children to develop as writers. If we can organise the teaching of writing so that children are given the chance to immerse themselves in a particular type of writing and the feedback they receive be focused on clear ways they can improve, we have the chance to help children become better writers.

TRY IT AGAIN

If you think the 'write-reflect-write another' model would work well with your class, here are some ideas for other types of writing that lend themselves to this approach.

The further adventures of…

Stories with familiar characters who go on more than one adventure can work brilliantly. Children can write one story and then write another based on feedback from the first. Great texts where characters have a series adventures include:

- *Mango and Bambang* by Polly Faber and Clara Vulliamy
- *Paddington Stories* by John Bond
- *The Labours of Heracles*
- *Sinbad the Sailor*
- *The Odyssey*

Careful instructions

Instructional writing is a mainstay of writing in the primary school. Children could write a series of instructions with feedback in between based on:

- *Instructions* by Neil Gaiman
- *Until I Met Dudley* by Roger McGough and Chris Riddell
- *How Dinosaurs Really Work* by Alan Snow

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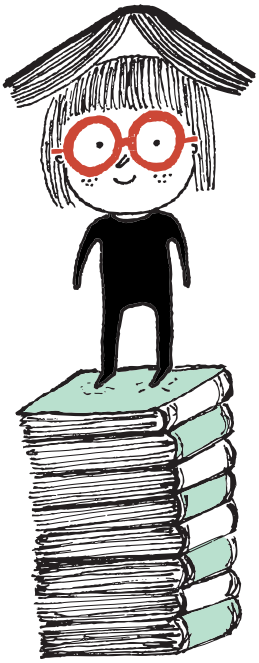


teach PRIMARY BOOK AWARDS

Discover the **new children's fiction titles** our judges really loved this year – and see what learning adventures they could open up for your pupils...

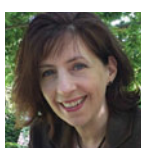
Putting the right book into a child's hands can sometimes be all that's needed to set that young person off on a lifelong journey of literary discovery and enjoyment (not to mention one of the most deeply satisfying things any teacher can do). Developing a love of reading in pupils can have a dramatic impact on final outcomes, too, of course – but with over 10,000 new titles for children published in the UK every year, how are busy parents and educators supposed to identify genuinely outstanding stories, with real potential to engage and entrance readers?

Amongst the many prizes that recognise brilliant writing for young people, the Teach Primary Book Awards are unique in highlighting books that not only will children love to read, but that will also support learning – for example, by opening up opportunities for deeper discussion and encouraging language play. Thanks to a carefully defined set of judging criteria, teachers can be confident that all 21 shortlisted titles offer something really special in terms of added value both in and out of the classroom – in other words, that each of them is as educationally enriching as it is creatively satisfying. We are enormously proud to be able to share this year's winners here, and hope your pupils enjoy them at least as much as our judges clearly did!

"I thoroughly enjoyed judging the Teach Primary Book Awards again this year – it's such a wonderful opportunity to read some of the very best new fiction and picture books for children. It's always a great field, but I think this year's shortlists were especially strong and really show how many wonderful new children's books there are out there." ***Clare Argar, judge***

MEET THE JUDGES

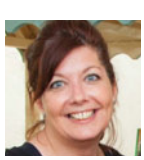
Rob Biddulph is an internationally best-selling, multi award-winning children's author and illustrator. His picture books include *Blown Away* (Waterstones Children's Book Prize), *Odd Dog Out* (BSC Festival of Literature Award), *GRRRRR!*, *Sunk!*, *Kevin* and the *Dinosaur Juniors* series. Previously, he was the art director of the Observer Magazine, the NME and Just Seventeen magazine.



Ali Sparkes is the author of more than 40 books including the Blue Peter Award winning *Frozen In Time*, the *Shapeshifter* series, *Car-Jacked* and *Night Speakers*. Starting out as a journalist, she wrote comedy for BBC Radio 4 for a spell before her first book was published by Oxford in 2006.

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 is also a governor at a primary school in Battersea, London.

Brough Girling is the co-founder 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, as well as founding editor of the Young Telegraph.

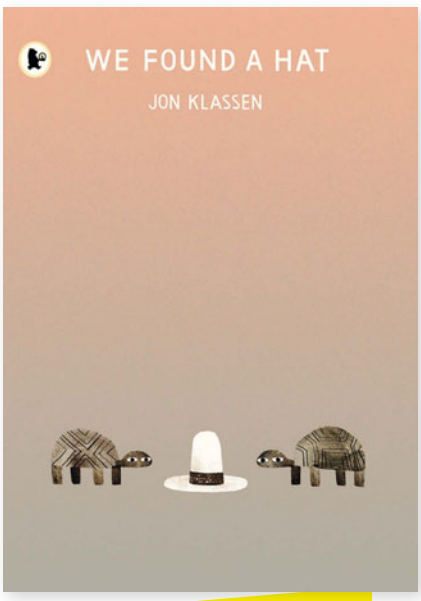


Tamara Macfarlane is a children's author and the owner of Tales on Moon Lane Children's Bookshop, Moon Lane Education Ltd, and Moon Lane Ink, which runs Pop-Up Bookshop Enterprise Days in secondary schools. She is passionate about promoting reading for pleasure through brilliant books and lively events.

RECEPTION

We Found a Hat *(Jon Klassen, Walker)*

When two turtles find one hat, and it looks equally good on both of them, how are they supposed to decide what to do next? The sustained hilarity and depth of emotional dilemma Jon Klassen manages to conjure from this simple scenario is astonishing; his chelonian protagonists exchange sparse, deadpan dialogue with impeccable comic timing, whilst an unspoken narrative concerning possession of the newly desired headgear unfolds around and between them. Children will find something new to amuse them every time they revisit the book – and the big questions it asks, about friendship, sharing and generosity are timeless, and addressed with a tender empathy that cannot fail to touch readers of all ages.



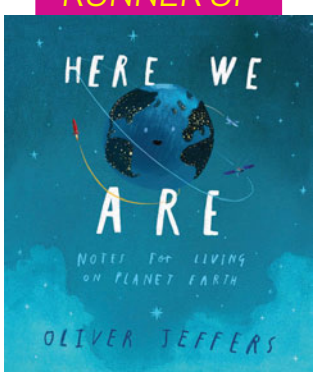
WINNER

"Wow, loved it – hats off! So simple; perfectly distilled – Klassen's work is an excellent example of how the picture book rule, that less equals more, works." **Brough Girling**

What were we looking for?

As you might expect, there was no shortage of incredibly beautiful picture books entered for this category – however, our judges were in search of titles with real synergy between illustration and language; each element subtly enhancing the other to produce a truly inspiring early reading experience.

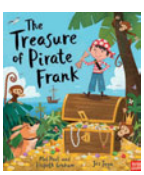
RUNNER UP



Here We Are (Oliver Jeffers, Harper Collins)

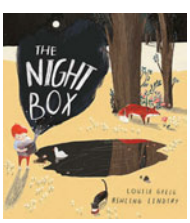
Oliver Jeffers created this beautiful gift of a book by way of an introduction to the world for his new son – gentle, thoughtful, but never taking itself too seriously, it's a gorgeous guidebook for how to live well on our marvellous, but all too often troubled, planet.

ALSO SHORTLISTED



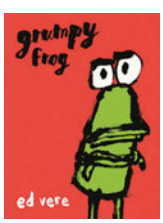
The Treasure of Pirate Frank (Mal Peet/Elspeth Graham/Jez Tuya, Nosy Crow)

Classy, repeating text; ambitious language; and detailed, engaging illustrations all make this story of a hunt for pirate treasure a sheer delight – there's a brilliant twist in the tale at the end, too.



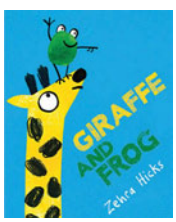
The Night Box (Louise Greig/Ashing Lindsay, Egmont)

Profoundly poetic, with stunning artwork, this book is a charming celebration of the wondrous and magical nature of night-time.



Grumpy Frog (Ed Vere, Puffin)

Grumpy Frog is not actually grumpy, thank you very much. He just likes hopping, and the colour green, and winning. At everything. But when things don't go according to plan, he has an important lesson to learn…



Giraffe and Frog (Zehra Hicks, Two Hoots Publishing)

Giraffe and Frog are going to the beach – but while the former insists on leading the way, it's the amphibian who really knows where they need to go. Will they ever reach the sea?

KS1

WINNER

The Incredible Dadventure *(Dave Lowe, Piccadilly Press)*

Holly's dad is an explorer, having amazing adventures all over the world – while Holly is stuck at home, living a boring and ordinary life with her mum, her baby brother and the dog. When she realises that her dad is going to miss her tenth birthday, thanks to his latest expedition, Holly is not happy – until she finds out that he's planned a special treasure hunt, just for her. She has to complete ten tasks in ten days – some silly, some tricky, and some downright terrifying; and in the process of carrying them out, she learns that she shares more of her dad's adventurous spirit than she had ever realised, and that in fact, life doesn't need to be boring at all. Perfectly pitched for a tricky age group, this is a great read with an important message, and plenty of heart.

What were we looking for?
The reading skills of KS1 children can vary enormously – for this category, therefore, success depended on real breadth of appeal; a pacy, engaging story; and genuine learning opportunities for all abilities, as well as originality and clever use of illustration.

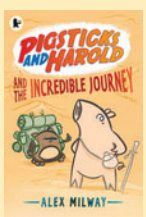
"A warm and funny tale with surprising emotional depth as our young heroine takes on a series of challenges set by her globetrotting explorer father – and faces down her fears along the way." ***Ali Sparkes***

RUNNER UP

Storm Whale (Sarah Brennan /Jane Tanner, Old Barn Books)
An absolute joy to read aloud, told in elegantly phrased rhyming couplets and with fantastic, rich illustrations throughout, this story of three sisters who find a whale stranded on a windswept beach and try to save it powerfully brings home both the majesty and vulnerability of nature, and our place in it.

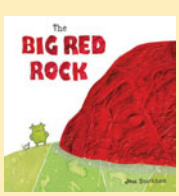
ALSO SHORTLISTED

Museum Mystery Squad and the Case of the Hidden Hieroglyphics (Mike Nicholson, Young Kelpies)
Interactive games and puzzles are scattered throughout this engaging mystery with a historical twist – and children will love pitching their sleuthing skills against those of the Museum Mystery Squad.



Pigsticks and Harold in the Incredible Journey to… the Ends of the Earth! (Alex Milway, Walker)
Armed only with Pigstick's love of adventure, Harold the hamster's common sense, and a mutual love of cake, our protagonists set off to discover the Ends of the Earth in this splendidly silly adventure.

After the Fall (Dan Santat, Andersen Press)
We all know the story of Humpty Dumpty – but what happened after all the king's horses and men put him back together again, and left? Dan Santat's stylish answer could be inspire some interesting nursery rhyme sequels from your pupils.

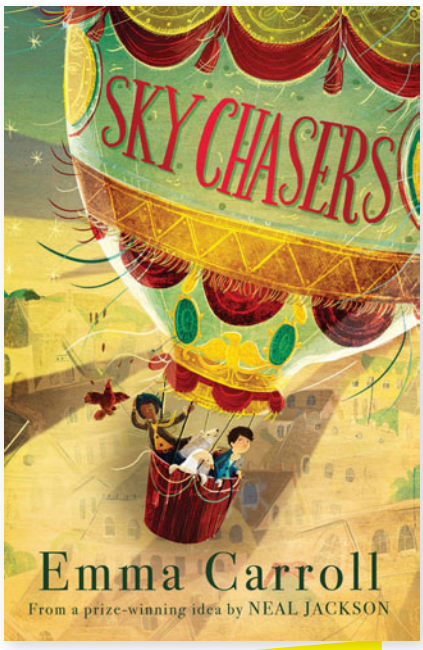


The Big Red Rock (Jess Stockham, Child's Play)
When Bif finds a big red rock blocking his way, he decides it has to go. But nothing he tries will move it – and his friends have no more luck; could teamwork save the day?

KS2

Sky Chasers *(Emma Carroll, Chicken House)*

In 2014, Neal Jackson entered the Big Idea competition – a scheme that sees the winner's suggestion turned into a book by an established children's author. Jackson's notion was to conceive a story focused on the famous Montgolfier hot-air balloon, unveiled before King Louis XVI at Versailles in 1783, which transformed a duck, a rooster and a sheep into the first aeronauts. It's a delightful tableau – and in *Sky Chasers* the author Emma Carroll brings it to sparkling, thrilling life with her wonderful imagination and narrative genius. Teaming a smart, tough and resourceful orphan, Magpie, with Montgolfier's thoughtful son, Pierre – and throwing in a sinister pack of English rogues determined to steal the French inventor's secrets – Carroll takes readers on a truly captivating and unforgettable journey.



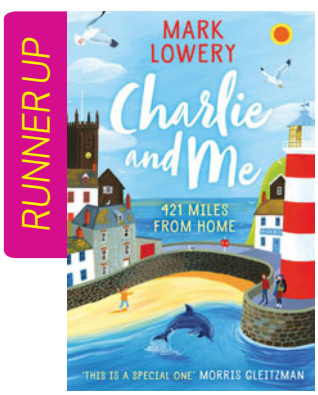
WINNER

What were we looking for?

As in previous years, the scores in this category were the highest overall – and the closest, too, with just one mark separating the eventual winner from the runner up. Exceptionally skilled storytelling was a must for our judges, with emotional depth and thought-provoking subject matter also key considerations.

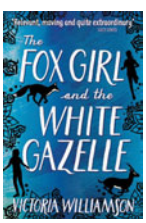
"From the moment I picked up this book I just knew kids were going to love it. Emma Carroll skilfully weaves high drama, unexpected friendships and several genuine 'high-five' moments into a brilliantly breathless tapestry of adventure. It's a total triumph!" ***Rob Biddulph***

RUNNER UP



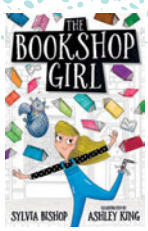
Charlie and Me (Mark Lowery, Piccadilly Press)
Martin and his younger brother Charlie have snuck out of their house, determined to travel 421 miles from Preston to Cornwall, to see a dolphin. They're in trouble from the moment they leave – but it's a journey that has to be made, and there's a secret that must be faced before life can go on. Both heartbreaking and uplifting (and also, very funny), this is an exquisitely told story that will stay with readers long after the final page has been turned.

ALSO SHORTLISTED

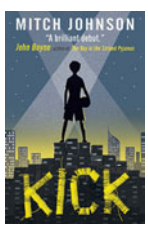


The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle (Victoria Williamson, Kelpies)
A beautiful, lyrically told story of two girls, one a Syrian refugee, the other from Glasgow, who have more in common than they could imagine.

The Girl Who Drank the Moon (Kelly Barnhill, Piccadilly Press)
A good witch accidentally gives a baby magical powers, in this entrancing fantasy with authentic emotional resonance.



The Bookshop Girl (Sylvia Bishop, Scholastic)
Property Jones loves living in the bookshop where she was found at five years old – but will she ever pluck up the courage to admit that she can't actually read?



Kick (Mitch Johnson, Usborne)
In the streets of Jakarta, Budi dreams of becoming a star football player – but his days are spent stitching boots in a sweatshop. And then, one unlucky kick sends his whole world spinning...

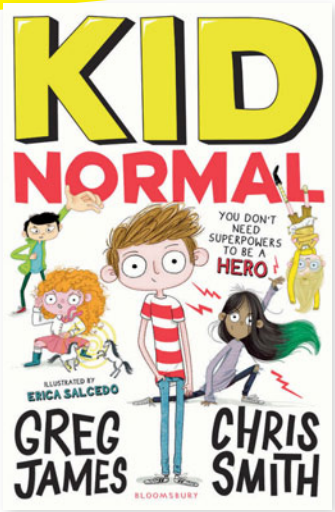
THE FirstNews
NEWS TO GET YOUNG PEOPLE TALKING

FUNNY CATEGORY

WINNER

Kid Normal *(Greg James and Chris Smith, Bloomsbury)*

You might expect the debut children's book by a pair of radio personalities largely known for their work on BBC Radio 1 to be 'zany'; for the narrative to be bold, irreverent and crammed with jokes, many of them deliberately daft. And yes, Greg James and Chris Smith deliver on all these counts – but there's a lot more to this tale of an ordinary boy who finds himself enrolled in a secret school for superheroes than mere joyful silliness and cheek. The writing is sharp and sophisticated, with the humour layered, rather than delivered in a series of set-ups and sucker punches; and neatly tucked inside the fast-paced story about saving the world from an evil scientist-turned-wasp is a touching subplot about the many different shapes in which families come, and the need for all of us find a place of stability in our lives, from which we can start to explore who we really are. It's an impressive achievement.



Authors Greg James and Chris Smith share their thoughts about bringing laughter into the classroom on page 22 of this issue!

What were we looking for?

Shortlisted titles in this category were judged by a panel of young *First News* readers in Years 4 and 5 at Portway Primary School in London – part of the The Leading Learning Trust. We wanted to know what tickled their funny bones, yes; but also asked them to look for "a fantastic plot, memorable characters and great dialogue", as well as the jokes. "It was great to hear such rich discussions about the humour in the texts," says teacher Scott Chudley. "The children applied their understanding of democracy when they didn't agree with other's opinions, and felt privileged to undertake such an important role. Britain's Got Talent judges– watch out!"

"I really like the word play in the book – this makes me laugh!"

"I like being able to get inside the character's head… he is really relatable to children today."

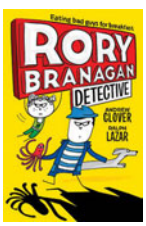
"When I am reading the book, it makes me feel like I am inside the book and part of the school!"

"When grown-ups read the book it reminds them of what their childhood was like."

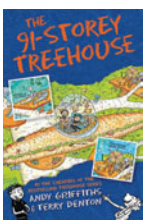
"It was laugh out loud, it made my sides hurts with laughter!"

First News judges Daniel, Ruby, Azriella, Fabian and Nabeeha, Years 4 and 5

ALSO SHORTLISTED



Rory Branagan Detective (Andrew Clover/Ralph Lazar, Harper Collins)
There's definitely substance alongside the silliness in this page-turner of a book, which features a 10-year-old detective; a mysterious poisoning; hilarious artwork on every page; and some fabulously surreal flights of imagination…



The 91-Storey Treehouse (Andy Griffiths/ Terry Denton, Macmillan)
Fizzing prose and fantastic, cartoon-style illustrations ensure the pace never drops for a moment throughout this laugh-out-loud story – and children will love coming up with their own, crazy treehouse designs!

WHY FIRST NEWS?

First News is the UK's only national newspaper for young people – speaking directly to children about the world around them in a voice they can recognise and trust. Over half of all UK schools already subscribe to the paper, and each week, a team of educational specialists also creates a wealth of teaching resources to spark engagement with current affairs. The *First News* reading package includes downloadable, differentiated reading activities based on stories in that week's newspaper – and its new, BETT award-winning digital literacy product, the iHub, brings an exciting, online dimension to literacy and learning, offering interactive reading challenges based around current affairs.
Find out more, and subscribe at **schools.firstnews.co.uk**

What were we looking for?
For this category, we asked you what your favourite book is to teach – and hundreds of you responded, championing an impressive range of authors and titles both classic and contemporary, from Shakespeare and Shirley Hughes to JRR Tolkien and Jacqueline Wilson. Reasons for your choices tended to focus on how easily the stories lend themselves to classroom activities, especially those aimed at improving writing – but the phrase used more often than any other was, quite simply (and wonderfully), "the children love it"...

THE TEACHERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Kensuke's Kingdom (*Michael Morpurgo, Egmont*)

No fewer than nine different titles by master-storyteller Morpurgo cropped up in the final list of teachers' literary favourites (the only author with more individual books mentioned was, perhaps unsurprisingly, Roald Dahl) – but this story of a young boy who ends up stranded on a desert island, and the poignant relationship that develops between him and the obstinate, elderly Japanese man into whose 'kingdom' he has unwittingly trespassed, was by far the most popular. And really, it's easy to see why – the language is descriptive yet accessible; the potential for making cross-curricular links is vast; and the story is both satisfyingly adventurous and emotionally profound, not to mention timeless.

WINNER

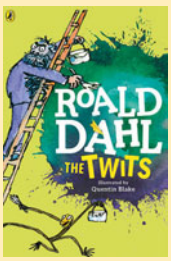
WHY TEACHERS LOVE IT:

"It's a great 'topic' book with so many curricular areas that can be covered including history, geography, and science. The kids love it!"

"There is an element of mystery that the kids love. Descriptions are amazing and there are so many places you can take the learning. Great wall displays potential, too."

1st RUNNER UP

The Twits (Roald Dahl, Puffin)



Why teachers love it:

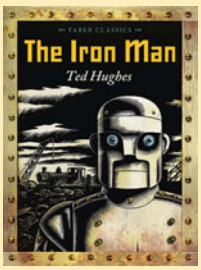
"The characters are so naughty and horrible, I love seeing the children's shocked faces!"

"It has great descriptions of the characters – great for modelling writing and extending vocabulary. The children think the pranks are hilarious, so it is very engaging for a younger audience. Having a smaller 'cast' means that you can explore the characters on a deeper level. It can also be linked very effectively to other subject areas – like art, geography and PSHE (Mrs Twit was not always ugly...)"

"It's funny and relates to other books."

2nd RUNNER UP

The Iron Man (Ted Hughes, Faber & Faber)



Why teachers love it:

"My class love it. I've taught from it for three years now in Year 3."

"Amazing descriptions of a science fiction character. There are lots of resources available, and strong links with other subjects – art, DT, maths, geography to name a few."

Honourable mention

Wonder (R J Palacio, Corgi Children's)

Why teachers love it:

"Teaches about so many subjects but most importantly, about kindness."

"The message of this book can be tied into any lesson or activity we do – we reference this book every day in my classroom!"

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Spelling games **that stick**

Does your class learn how to spell words one week, only to forget the next? It's time for a more memorable strategy, says **Rachel Clarke**

Children are good at learning lists of words for spelling tests. I know this because I've seen plenty of mark books with little rows of 9s and 10s against pupils' names. What children aren't so good at doing, however, is learning spellings and then applying them in their writing several weeks after the test. One way to counter this and ensure pupils retain spelling knowledge longterm is to ensure the teaching of words, rules and patterns is active and engaging – and I've got several suggestions on just how to achieve this. Introducing children to a variety of games and structures that can be used and reused with multiple spelling objectives ensures learning is enjoyable, that children recognise the structures (avoiding the need for lengthy instructions) and that you save time by selecting successful activities.

1. Kim's game

This is an adaptation of an old parlour game where a selection of items are placed on a tray. The tray is covered whilst one item is removed. Once uncovered, the players guess the missing item.

As a spelling activity, all you need to do is display the class' current spelling words on separate cards on the whiteboard. Then ask the children to close their eyes while you remove one of the word cards. When they open their eyes, the children should try to determine which word is missing and write this on a mini-whiteboard. You then need to check their answers for accuracy, replace the missing word card and repeat the game.

2. Boggle

Another firm favourite is this popular word game. I find a 3x3 grid is sufficient, but with older children you may want to increase the amount of available letters by making the grid larger.

Ensure that the spelling pattern you have been learning is included in the grid and ask the children to build as many words as they can within the time limit using the available letters. You may need to remind them that they can only use each letter once in each word. This activity works well with competitive children.

p	n	r
f	ai	l
g	d	s

3. Aunt Milly Likes

Every now and again I like to share words with the children without telling them which spelling rule connects them, which means they have to use their powers of deduction to work this out for themselves. To do this, I use a game called Aunt Milly Likes. All that's required to play is a simple table on the whiteboard and a succession of clues about what Aunt Milly likes and dislikes. For example, "Aunt Milly likes waves, but she doesn't like sand"; "Aunt Milly likes snakes but she doesn't like snails"; "Aunt Milly likes cake but she doesn't like biscuits".

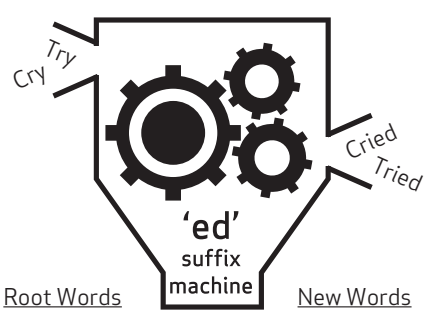
LIKES	DISLIKES
WAVES	SAND
SNAKES	SNAILS
CAKE	BISCUITS
MAKE	MEND

By completing the table with the children, you will be able to listen to their suggestions about the rule and even ask them to suggest further things that Aunt Milly might like. The great thing about this game is that it can be used over and over again with different spelling rules.

4. The Suffix Machine

This is a really versatile technique for teaching spelling. All you need is a drawing of a machine on the whiteboard, a label indicating the suffix that the machine adds to words, and a table to record the spelling of the words before and after they entered the Suffix Machine. You then need to work your way through a list of words, asking the children to predict what will happen to each word once it's travelled through the Suffix Machine.

As with Aunty Milly Likes, the power of this activity lies in asking the children to explain the spelling rule rather than telling them what takes place. E.g.



ROOT WORD	+ ED
CRY	CRIED
DRY	DRIED

SIX WAYS TO ADD SPARKLE TO SPELLING PRACTICE

In addition to fun and engaging teaching, children need to practise learning to spell the words they've been taught. We've all used the look, cover, write, check method to do this, but what other ways are there to practise new and tricky words? Here are six fun ideas that will keep spelling practice fresh and interesting.

Cross off tricky words

Practise high frequency and tricky words by playing a variation on noughts and crosses. Each player selects one tricky word they need to practise e.g. 'She' and 'Are'. They then take turns to write their tricky word in the sections of the noughts and crosses grid, just as they would in the traditional game.

Add colour

Encourage children to add some colour to their spelling practice by writing each word they need to learn in a colour of their choice. Tell them to go over the outline of each word in a different colour. They should repeat this until each word on their list is a rainbowof colours.

Fortune spelling

Create the next playground trend by showing children how to make an origami chatterbox (sometimes called a fortune teller). Encourage them to label each flap with a word from the class spelling list. They should then write encouraging statements such as 'super speller' or 'word wizard' under the innermost flaps.

Children should then challenge a friend to choose words from the chatterbox, spell them and eventually reveal their spelling fortune.

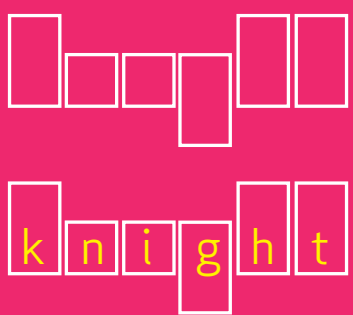
Skill building

Building a word pyramid is a fun way to practise new and tricky words. Unlike a real pyramid, you start at the top and work down. So, if you were practising writing 'pyramid', you'd start with p, then on the next line write py, on the next pyr and so on until you end up with this:

p
py
pyr
pyra
pyram
pyrami
pyramid

Get into shape

Teach children to recognise the shape of words on their spelling lists by asking them to draw an outline around each letter. Children should then try to fill blank outlines with the words from their spelling list. E.g



Make a dash

Reinforce children's understanding of vowels by asking them to write out each word from their spelling list with a dash in the place of each vowel. Having done this, they should then go back and fill in the spaces.

RACHEL CLARKE (@PrimaryEnglish) is the author of *Spelling Rules! Y2* Published by Keen Kite books.

Play your way to GREAT GRAMMAR

With these dice games, children will understand how changing a single preposition can make a powerful impact on the reader, say **Christine Chen** and **Lindsay Pickton**

Children learn to write beautifully primarily by being exposed to beautiful writing, not by naming the component parts of a sentence; indeed, we have heard a number of inspirational children's authors decry the teaching of grammar, pointing out that they never needed to know what a subordinate clause was. While we understand where this comes from, there's much more to grammar than parsing; it's an integral feature of language. Maybe it just needs better PR!

Grammatical terminology provides teachers with a shared language for giving children feedback on their writing. In the same way we might say, "Try using a simile there," we may also say, "There's some repetition in your prepositions," or, "A lot of your sentences begin with adverbials; try moving some of them into different positions."

More importantly, though, there is the acquisition of mindful writing: an awareness of how the selection of words and phrases has an impact on meaning, and therefore the reader. For us, this is the real purpose of grammar: understanding how language can be manipulated to achieve different ends – in both comprehension and composition.

Dry, label-the-parts grammar lessons do not support the above. Encouraging a playful, experimental – even risk-taking – attitude to language through grammar games, however, gives children the chance to understand the impact of their choices, and those of others; and this is why we love creating them.

Some games involve drama and explore the ways in which language choices influence action and behaviour; others investigate clarity and precision in the description of characters and scenes. Then there are activities that play with the impact of syntax and clause structures.

But here it's our ever-evolving dice games we'd like to share. These help take the fear out of grammar, introducing a little magic through the element of surprise.

Why not try the examples in this article and adapt them for your children?

HOW TO TEACH GRAMMAR WITH DICE

To play Every Word Counts, create a six-word sentence, and attach a number to each word, in order:

She leapt from the plummeting helicopter.
1 2 3 4 5 6

First, consider the story: who might *she* be? Whose helicopter is it? Why is it plummeting?

With each throw of the dice, consider a range of alternative words that will work in the sentence and carefully examine how each alteration changes its meaning. Obviously, if we throw a 6 and change helicopter to something like dragon, we have completely changed the genre. But notice too how even changes to words with a grammatical function can make an impact.

Look what might happen, for example, if we throw a 4:

- She leapt from *a* plummeting helicopter.
- She leapt from *her* plummeting helicopter.
- She leapt from *that* plummeting helicopter.
- She leapt from *my* plummeting helicopter.

Once children have experienced this, you can introduce the grammatical terminology beneath the sentence; the correct labels will be acquired, over time, while the focus stays on manipulating the meaning.

They lunged at the closed door.
1 2 3 4 5 6

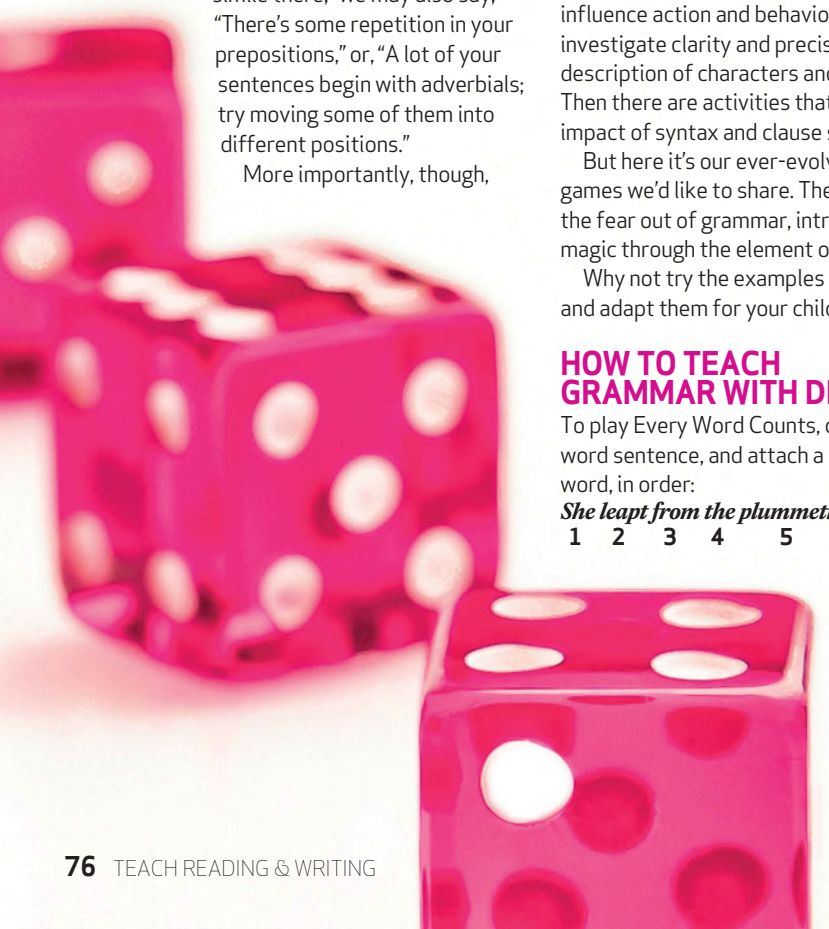
1 pronoun **2** verb
3 preposition **4** determiner
5 adjective **6** noun

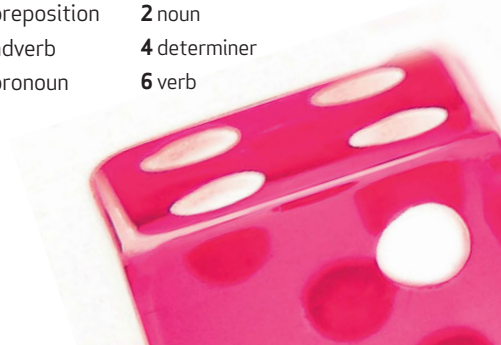
So, if you throw a 3, say, "Change the preposition." But always keep the emphasis on how meaning is affected while teaching the terminology.

You may also modify the game in order to challenge children's knowledge of terms. Create the sentence without numbering the words; keep the numbers on the terminology list, *but in the wrong order:*

Then, I leapt onto the motorcycle.

1 preposition **2** noun
3 adverb **4** determiner
5 pronoun **6** verb





If you throw a 3, say, "Change the adverb." To do this, children have to know which word is the adverb! Again, always keep the focus upon the story created by the vocabulary exchanges, as this is what grammar is for; though important, terminology is a secondary benefit.

EXPERIMENT WITH STRUCTURE

The basic dice game can be modified to introduce varied sentence structures, for example, starting with a preposition:

Across the crowded room he strode.
1 2 3 4 5 6

1 preposition **2** determiner
3 adjective **4** noun
5 pronoun **6** verb

Or with an abstract noun:

Panic swept through the bustling bazaar.
1 2 3 4 5 6

1 abstract noun **2** verb
3 preposition **4** determiner
5 adjective **6** noun

This structure is a particular favourite of ours – applied in composition, it conveys mood in a very immediate and concise way.

Notice how much impact you can achieve through swapping abstract nouns (e.g. *peace, bliss, anticipation*) or verbs (e.g. *trickled, stalked, tiptoed*).

To really emphasise how grammar choices influence meaning, you may use a sentence from a class story – one you are reading or composing together.

He struggled up the swaying beanstalk.
1 2 3 4 5 6

1 pronoun **2** verb
3 preposition **4** determiner
5 adjective **6** noun

With each change, consider what has happened. Changing the pronoun to *I, she* or *they* significantly alters the telling of the story, whereas changing the verb might affect the mood, e.g. *He bounded up the swaying beanstalk.*

CHANGING THE MOOD

Great writers affect us, and they do this through the language choices they make. By contrast, the assessment frameworks appear to encourage children to 'do grammar' to their writing, resulting in a dispiriting tick-it-off-the-list style that shows little or no awareness of impact on the reader. If we attach grammatical choices to desired moods or atmospheres, however, children discover the affecting power of language while fulfilling national curriculum requirements.

Mood-Maker is a game that teaches children to make their language choices in pursuit of creating a particular atmosphere. Play can be based on any of the versions of Every Word Counts explained above, but you should use a deliberately bland starting sentence. Begin by generating six moods, attaching a number to each.

1 creepy **2** joyful
3 shocking **4** sad
5 funny **6** exciting

An initial dice throw selects the mood that should be applied to every word choice that follows. For example:

She walked to the old building.
1 2 3 4 5 6

1 subject **2** verb
3 preposition **4** determiner
5 adjective **6** noun (object)

Throwing a 1 means the mood is *creepy*. Throwing another 1 means you have to change *she* in a way that contributes to creepiness, e.g. *it*. Then, if you throw a 5, the adjective must also be creepy, e.g. *haunted or derelict*. Thus, *She walked to the old building* could become *It stalked towards their derelict cabin.*

A more complex version of the same game might look something like this:

He walked up the stairs.

MOOD:
1 creepy **2** joyful
3 shocking **4** sad
5 funny **6** exciting

GRAMMAR:
1 Change the subject
2 Change the verb
3 Change the determiner
4 Add an adverbial for when
5 Add an adverbial for how
6 Expand the noun phrase

Again the initial dice throw defines the mood. Subsequent throws direct the alterations and additions. Don't feel you have to work through all six functions as this may lead to a clumsy sentence, which is the last thing we want. Thus, '*He walked up the stairs*' might become '*The masked man leapt explosively up my attic stairs.*'

Can you work out the mood defined by our first dice throw? If not, we need to work on our choices, and you may be able to suggest something better!

CHRISTINE CHEN and **LINDSAY PICKTON** are primary education advisors (primaryeducationadvisors.co.uk) supporting English development nationally.

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"Everyone's looking for inspiration"

When **Alesha Dixon** was a child, reading represented escape – now, she's writing to empower others...

When I think about reading, 'comfort' is the word that instantly comes to mind. As a child, sharing a book with my mum or a teacher, or finding a story by myself that I loved and could get lost in; those were cosy times of real peace and contentment.

I was a bright kid, and apparently I was reading *Peter and Jane* books by the time I was five. I have memories of the series, definitely, but not the process by which I came to be able to understand them – I don't recall that 'first moment' when the words on the page started to make sense. What I do remember, though – and really powerfully – is the *feeling* I got when I was reading, and still do. It's pure escapism – just like music, it offers me a chance to dive into something completely, and let my imagination come alive.

I was very creative from an early age, and I absolutely loved primary school; I was one of those children who would still beg to go in, even if I was poorly. I remember once, when I was about seven, I'd done some choreography for the school play. The head, Mrs Weekes, came up to me afterwards, looked me straight in the eye and said, very seriously, "I don't want to see you working in Woolworth's after this!" Not there's anything wrong with a job in retail, of course; but even then I knew she meant that she hoped I'd end up using my creativity in life. It made a huge impression on me – the fact is, when you're little, having someone in authority say something like that to you is incredibly powerful.

When I was at secondary school, I was determined to become a PE teacher; I always had an end goal in mind, and I excelled at sports. I also did well in the other subjects I enjoyed: English language, geography, drama and art. I wasn't so keen on history, though, nor languages. If only I'd known back then how much travel my future career would involve – when I was offered the chance to learn Japanese, I turned it down, thinking I'd never need it, but now Japan is one of my favourite places in the world, and I've spent so much time there; I really regret not taking that opportunity. It's hard, though, to make those kinds of choices as a teenager, when no matter how focused you are, you don't really know how you want your life to turn out, or what's going to happen. I don't see why there has to be this pressure in Year 8 or 9 to take restrictive options; I don't think it's necessary or helpful to start pushing children down a particular path that might not end up being right for them.

I wasn't a perfect student, and I had my demons. For all children – but especially for those living in challenging situations – teachers really are the key to a successful experience at school. I had some amazing ones, especially Miss Cooke and Mrs Furness, who taught PE. When Mrs Furness found me in tears because I'd been selected for County netball but had no way of getting to training, she offered to take me herself, every week, because she didn't want me to miss out. It was such

a big deal, giving up her own time like that, and I've never forgotten it.

I didn't see myself as an author when I was younger, but I'd much rather be performing, or creating, than anything else – and I've always been a writer, whether of songs, documentary scripts or whatever project I've been working on, so writing a book seemed like a natural creative venture for me to explore. I wanted to do something unexpected, too; I really didn't like the idea of producing another 'celebrity memoir' to add to the shelves. I read to my daughter all the time and, looking at the role models available to her through literature, it quickly became clear that there weren't many books in which she would be able to see herself accurately reflected. I wanted to come up with a positive, powerful character who was also a child of colour – and what I've ended up creating, I hope, is a superhero whom anyone can emulate, because everyone has the potential to do good things, to be a good person.

Everyone's looking for inspiration, aren't they? And if *Lightning Girl* might inspire even just one person, that's wonderful to me. It's such an enjoyable experience, to write a book – I feel proud, and excited, and I can't wait to hear what readers think about it. Thinking that what I've written will be read by children is an amazing feeling.

***Lightning Girl* by Alesha Dixon is out now, published by Scholastic Children's Books**

"LIBRARIES GAVE ME SANCTUARY"

At school, **Lucy Mangan** found endless books and a space in which to read them – but will tomorrow's children be so lucky?

Three schools – primary, secondary and sixth form college – and three libraries, in increasing order of splendour mark my pedagogic progress.

At my primary school the library was half a classroom set aside for the purpose. Sharp-edged metal shelves lined three walls, forming a horseshoe round a rectangular piece of thin polyester matting. Technically, it couldn't have been more cheerless. To a bookworm, though, the content made it a heaven and a haven.

On the shelves was what I suspect a more critical observer would have judged a motley collection of volumes. To me it was an esoteric treasure trove. Amidst countless tatty books – but still, *books*! – about cars, nursing, rabbits Brer and Peter, and (increasingly strangely the more I think about it) a hardback edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I quickly came to have my favourites. Amongst a run of Antelope books on the farthest wall was *Adventuring with Brindle*, by Rosemary Garland, a simply riveting tale of a boy who runs away with his Great Dane when he fears his mother is going to get rid of her. I took it out so often I was eventually banned from doing so. I wept. Fifteen years ago I found a secondhand copy of it online. It was stupidly expensive, but I bought it. You can't put a price on justice.

A harsh lesson

But if that first library introduced me to the pleasures and perils of losing my heart, the second one stomped all over it. At first all was fine, careless rapture. I doted on John Branfield's *Sugar Mouse*, *The Lily Pickle Band Book* by Gwen Grant, a book on running (I'm always interested in theory) and a book on hairstyles that Sally (my first flesh and blood friend, who was stacking up rather well against her fictional competition) and I used to visit at least once a week, open at a certain page and collapse, helpless with laughter, at the picture there of a woman with hair at least eight times the size of her head. (It was 1986.) And, above all, there was *Peter's Room*, by Antonia Forest. I was – still am – passionately devoted to her Marlowe school stories – but this, set in the holidays, was even better. I consumed it, I worshipped it, I tried to copy it out at home so that I could have my own edition – and then one day, it was gone. There had been a cull and it had disappeared from my life forever. I soldiered on, but school was never quite the same after that.

In the sixth form library, I discovered first world war poetry and a boy who liked Brecht. And when a sale was announced of books this school was culling, I moved swiftly and secured Forest's *The Marlows and the Traitor*. It was some small retroactive measure of redress.

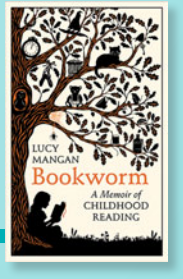
The individual details of 'my' libraries are fun to recall, but it is what they had in common with each other and with all libraries that makes them matter. They gave me sanctuary from the hurly-burly of school, which would frequently evolve into bullying as the years went on and people became less tolerant of oddities like me. It gave me access to books I would never otherwise have come across. All the books I most loved, from *Adventuring with Brindle* to *Peter's Room* were unavailable in the shops – either out of print or simply not stocked (I don't remember seeing any Antelope books on sale – were they only ever supplied to schools? Surely not?). The library was a portal to an older, alternative world.

Closing doors?

And outside the solipsistic universe of my childhood, of course, libraries would have been functioning differently and even more vitally for others. I was a lucky child from a happy home whose parents believed in the importance of books and reading and had the money to support my benign addiction. For others, the school library would have been their only portal to the world of literature.

That such portals are being forced shut by a parade of short-sighted (or actively malevolent – delete according to taste) government policies is unforgivable. To have 1980s state school provision now look like glory days is an unwelcome point to reach in life. But this too shall pass. I read that in a book somewhere.

Bookworm: A Memoir of Childhood Reading, by Lucy Mangan, is published by Vintage



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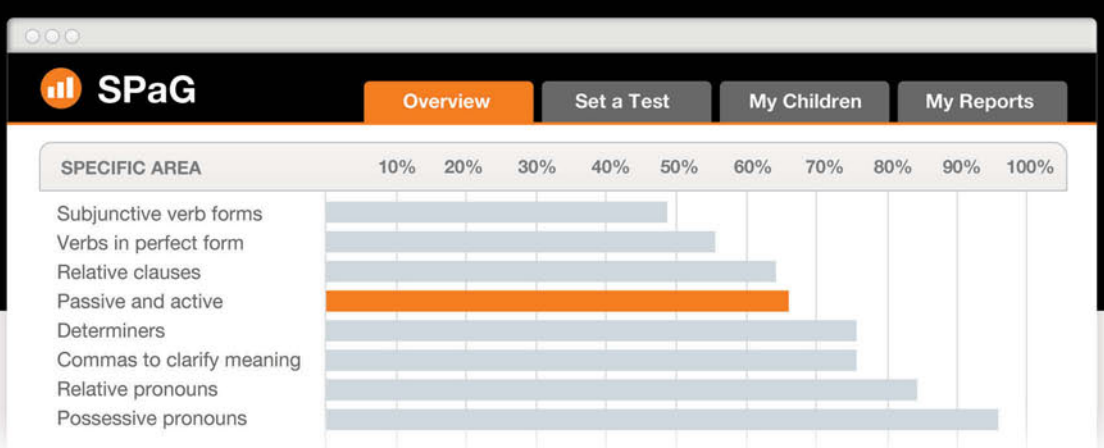

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