

Teach Reading & Writing

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TRADITIONAL TALES

Turn on the SUBTITLES

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outstanding results

HOW
VERSE NOVELS
MAKE POETRY
INCLUSIVE

WHY WE
MUST DITCH
ASSESSMENT
CRITERIA

KS2 WAGOLL!

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AND THE
UNICORN
THIEF**

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writing masterclass

Writer's block?

4 QUICK STEPS TO GET THE INK FLOWING

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10 BOOKS THAT TACKLE WAR AND CONFLICT



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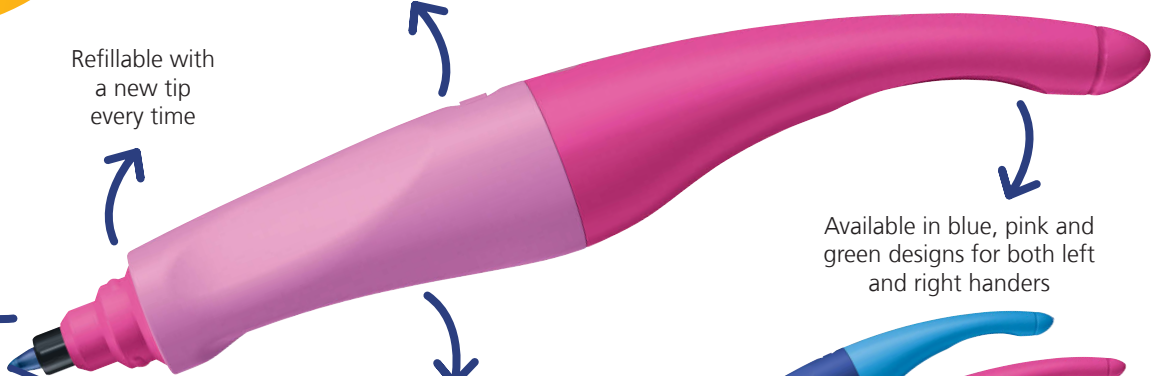
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Welcome...

We live in interesting times, it seems. With worrying and distressing news bombarding children from all angles, we can struggle to think how best to support them. But books, as ever, can provide us with invaluable tools for teaching and learning.

In this issue of *Teach Reading & Writing*, BookTrust's writer-in-residence, Rashmi Sirdeshpande, discusses the importance of good factual books in helping children to understand and navigate the world (page 24). While Carey Fluker Hunt has chosen ten of the best books about war and conflict, and outlined activities to accompany each title that will help children think about these tricky subjects (page 12). There's some comforting content on page 8 too, where A. F. Steadman, author of the *Skandar* books, advises KS2 children on how they can write a scene of companionable contentment – don't miss the free online resource pack that supports this article.

On page 23 you can find out all about the Turn on the Subtitles project, which has had remarkable success. Did you know that showing children subtitles while they're watching television can double the chances of them becoming good at reading?

Speaking of success, the ever-popular Pie Corbett has written another model text for us (page 42). This time he's retold a traditional tale in the style of a quirky and creepy detective story. He's provided teaching notes with real-world examples as well, to help you get pupils retelling stories in their own offbeat ways.

We've got lots more writing advice in this issue too, including a refreshing article on page 30 from English advisor Kathryn Brereton. She left the classroom behind and headed to the woods to come up with some inspiring outdoorsy writing activities.

There's also some great advice from CLiPPA-winning poet Matt Goodfellow on how to teach verse novels (page 18), and some thoughts from Chris Youles (page 26) on how you can assess writing by... ditching the assessment criteria!

Wishing you a happy and peaceful summer term.

Lydia Grove
(editor)

Take 10
books about
conflict... and
how we can deal
with it...
p.12



Practical teaching tips
and expert advice from
classroom teachers and
literacy leaders



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SIRDESHPANDE**

*At a time when fake news
can whizz across the
world faster than you can
say "Bob's your uncle",
children need resources that they can
trust... p.24*



HENRY WARREN

*Simply turning on
the television
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children's literacy
just as efficiently as
reading lengthy novels... p.23*



**JACOB SAGER
WEINSTEIN**

*Through my mother's
story, I was able to talk to
my children honestly but
gently about the cost of
hatred... p.6*



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‘How do we find hope when bad things happen?’

Author and scriptwriter **Jacob Sager Weinstein** on his new novel about the Holocaust, and how he connects with his readers

TR&W You’ve written across a variety of genres. How much does your process and writing persona differ depending on the work that you’re doing?

JSW ‘Writing persona’ is a great phrase! In face-to-face conversation, I’m a slightly different person depending on who I’m talking to. In writing, my persona also shifts depending on the reader that I’m imagining. But whether I’m speaking out loud or on the page, I always ask myself the same questions: *How do I see the world? How does my audience see the world? What must I do to bridge the gap between us?*

When I’m writing non-fiction for adults, the only difference between me and my audience is that I’ve researched a certain subject, and they haven’t. To bridge the gap, I just need to convey information in a clear and entertaining way. In that case, my writing persona ends up being pretty close to who I actually am. But when I’m writing fiction, I’m often conveying something more complex than mere facts. To do so, it sometimes helps to have a narrator who sees the world differently from

either me or the reader. By standing apart from either of us, the narrator gives me and the reader a common reference point.

When I’m writing for children, there’s not just a gap in research or perspective; there’s a gap in life experience and even in brain development. I think carefully about how to bridge that, and sometimes it takes me a few tries to get it right. I wrote the first draft of *The City of Secret Rivers* in an arch third-person voice, and when I gave it to some young friends of mine, they stopped reading after a few chapters. So I rewrote it in a more personal, emotional first-person voice, and suddenly kids loved it. It was still the same story, but I had found the right bridge to transport children into it.

At other times, the narrative voice comes more easily. *What Rosa Brought* sprung out of the family stories I told my children, and I knew I wanted to write it in the simple but honest tone that I strove for in discussing difficult issues with them.

What prompted you to write your latest book, *What Rosa Brought*?

There came a time when my children were ready to start learning about prejudice and where it can lead, but they weren’t ready to face the full horrors of the Holocaust.

As it happened, we had the right family story for that moment.

My family is Jewish, and my mom was a little girl during the Nazi occupation of Vienna. Miraculously, she and her parents escaped to America before the worst happened.

Through my mother’s story, I was able to talk to my kids honestly but gently about the cost of hatred.

My mother’s story helped me begin a difficult but necessary conversation with my kids. I thought it could help others begin that conversation as well.

How would you like teachers to use *What Rosa Brought* in the classroom?

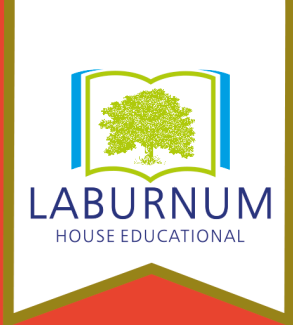
Although *What Rosa Brought* tells a complete story, it’s meant to raise questions. Some of these revolve around the facts. After leaving Vienna, why did Rosa never see her grandmother again?

Other questions require grappling with matters that baffle even philosophers. How do we find hope when bad things happen?

I would like teachers to use *What Rosa Brought* as a starting point for approaching those questions. Different children will be ready for different kinds of discussions, and I trust teachers to know how much of the world’s unfairness a specific classroom is ready to face. I see *What Rosa Brought* as an early step on a lifelong voyage of grappling with difficult questions.



Jacob Sager Weinstein is the author of several books for adults and children. He has written for HBO, the BBC, The New Yorker and The Onion. *What Rosa Brought* (£12.99) illustrated by Eliza Wheeler is available now.



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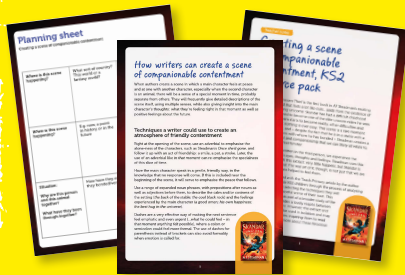
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WAGOLL

Skandar and the Unicorn Thief by A.F. Steadman

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to describe a scene of companionable contentment

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RESOURCES AT



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

tinyurl.com/tp-Skandar

S *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief* is the first book in the Skandar series. These fantasy adventures are set in a world very similar to our own, with one major difference: unicorns are real, and they're bloodthirsty. Within this book's pages you'll find ferocious unicorns, elemental magic, and a thirteen-year-old hero called Skandar, who is determined to be chosen to go to the magical Island and bond with a ferocious unicorn. Fire, water, air, and earth magic are at the core of the magic system on the Island, but when Skandar finds out which element he is allied to, his life takes a dangerous turn.



Skandar and the Chaos Trials, the third adventure in the series, is out now.

Along with his quartet of friends, *Skandar* quickly finds himself involved in nail-biting races, sky battles, ancient secrets, epic adventures, fierce friendships and—occasionally—flaming unicorn farts. But this is also a book about finding people who accept you for who you really are, and about the fierce bond that can exist between humans and animals. It's a book about loving people—even when loving them can be hard. And about doing the right thing—even when it scares you. It's about how we are made up of all kinds of visible and invisible pieces. There are so many different facets of the elements, just like there are of people—and every single one is beautiful.

In the end, it's a book about how we can find ourselves in all of the elements,

and how on the days where we need to be a blaze rather than a spark, or a raindrop rather than a riptide, we have each other. The message of *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief* is a simple one, really: together, we are always stronger. Oh, and it turns out unicorns are a little more bloodthirsty than we expected. That too.

Fans of *Percy Jackson*, *Harry Potter*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Nevermoor*, *Alex Rider*, *Amari*, and *Artemis Fowl* will all find much to enjoy in the *Skandar* books. Aside from creative world-building and action scenes, one of the aspects that links the *Skandar* series with these other adventures is the strong friendships between the characters. Here's how to create your own scene of companionable contentment...

FIVE TOP TIPS FOR A CONTENTED SCENE

SET THE SCENE

Describing the setting clearly can help readers visualise the interaction between the characters without the distraction of trying to imagine where it's taking place.

CHOOSE THE LOCATION

Ensure the characters have a connection to the location of the scene. It could be a place they used to visit when they were younger, or a new place they've discovered together—this will build on the emotion of the moment.

EMPHASISE EMOTION

This kind of scene is your chance to convey the emotions your characters are feeling, and the friendship they have for one other. Don't shy away from using the opportunity to explore this in dialogue—which can often feel more immediate.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS

Building character profiles can really help create the most impactful scene of companionable contentment. The better you

know your character, the more easily the other characters and the reader can connect with them too.

BUILD ON PREVIOUS ENCOUNTERS

Since companionable contentment doesn't usually happen immediately, ask yourself what has happened before this moment you are describing. Referencing past shared experiences in the scene will make it feel more realistic, as well as involving the reader in the characters' friendship.



Find out more about the Skandar series at simonandschuster.co.uk/series/Skandar

Extract from

Extract from Chapter 9,
page 136

Exact details and descriptions of where the characters are will help readers visualise the companionship in the scene more clearly.

Physical proximity helps to build up the idea they are very content in each other's company. See also Skandar running his hand along Scoundrel's neck, above.

Comparing the feelings Skandar has for his unicorn to those he has for his sister – who readers know he loves – helps to convey the depth of feeling he has for his unicorn. It is also something readers with siblings may be able to relate to and imagine for themselves.

The one-word sentence at the end is there to emphasise how determined Skandar is that nothing will happen to Scoundrel, reinforcing the strength of their bond.

Once she'd gone, Skandar ran his hand along Scoundrel's neck. 'Do you mind if I stay in here with you? Just for a while?'

Skandar made his way to the back of the stable and slipped down against the cool black rock. Scoundrel followed his rider, stared down at him for a few seconds, and then collapsed in a heap himself on to the straw, resting his horned head on Skandar's knee. A sleepy wasp flew right past Scoundrel's nose. Skandar readied himself to stand up and run away. But in a split second Scoundrel had caught it between his teeth and swallowed it. It felt like a good omen. Scoundrel ruffled his wings and squeaked contentedly. Skandar felt his own happiness overflow too, as though he'd just sprinted into his sister's arms for the best hug in the universe. It was like the bond was magnifying his feelings, making them unicorn-sized. The world was bigger somehow. What he could do, what he could feel—in that moment anything felt possible.

Skandar's worries about Mitchell and the spirit element drifted away as he looked into his unicorn's eyes. They didn't need to speak to understand each other—the bond connecting their two hearts did all the talking for them. Skandar knew he'd do anything to protect Scoundrel. Somewhere under his black coat—between those spindly wings—was an elemental power that could get them both killed. But Skandar was never going to let anyone harm Scoundrel's Luck. **Ever.**

Even though unicorns can't talk in *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief*, that doesn't mean the humans can't talk at them! Using this one-sided dialogue helps to get across Skandar's closeness to Scoundrel.

Earlier in the book, readers learn that Skandar is afraid of creepy crawlies like wasps. This moment shows Scoundrel looking out for Skandar's fears – and hints at their closeness.

Here they are mirroring each other's feelings of happiness, and I set this out in sentences next to each other for emphasis.

Ending this section with an image of them staring into each other's eyes in silence helps build a picture of their non-verbal link.

In conversation: LEMONY SNICKET

It's 25 years since we were first introduced to the Baudelaire children. To mark this auspicious milestone, we took tea with their esteemed chronicler.

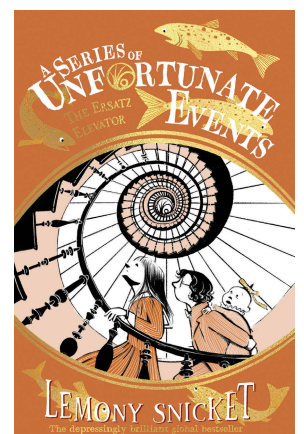
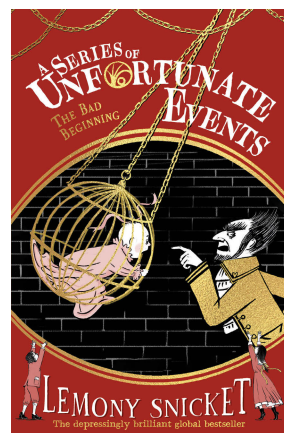
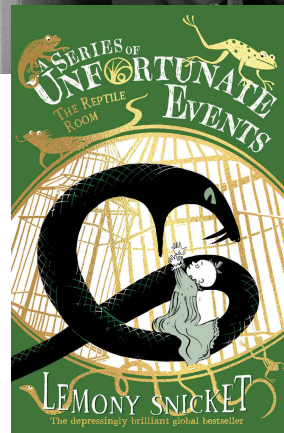
In what ways did working as a reporter for *The Daily Punctilio* hone your writing skills?

As a journalist I learned to sharpen my powers of observation as I walked around town: to eavesdrop on nearby people who might be talking about something interesting; to take notes on such intriguing events as might be happening around me; to research the sinister secrets lurking behind the surface; to interview innocent bystanders and guilty collaborators; and to type up the entire story as accurately as I could. I encourage anyone who is interested in writing to begin spying on whomever might be close at hand.

“It is during dreadful times that charming conversation is most prized and most comforting”

After documenting so much of their lives, what do you most admire about the Baudelaire children?

What I admire the most about Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire is their ability to carry on interesting conversation even when terrible things are happening around them. Talking to one another about the things on our minds, illustrated with stories we remember and whatever other charming observations seem suitable, is one of the crucial joys of life. It is easy to forget this when something terrible has happened, like



when a loved one has been murdered or you've spilled orange juice all over the floor. But it is during dreadful times that charming conversation is most prized and most comforting. I admire the Baudelaire children for keeping this in mind as their ghastly history continued.

I hate to ask but, Count Olaf... what are your thoughts on him these days? My thoughts on Count Olaf? I'm against him. I'm against almost all wickedness.

To mark the 25th anniversary of A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket, there'll be shiny new editions of all the books coming out this year. They will feature covers by Emily Gravett, two-time winner of the Carnegie Medal for illustration.

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10

BOOKS ABOUT *war and conflict*

Books are invaluable in helping children explore and consider difficult subjects from within a safe space...

1

FOUNDATION STAGE

The Little War Cat

BY HIBA NOOR KHAN, ILLUS. LAURA CHAMBERLAIN, MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



About this book

The little grey cat used to play beneath the palm trees in Aleppo, but everything has changed since the 'humans in boots' brought war to its streets. Luckily, one human still cares for stray and homeless creatures in a kinder place, and once the little grey cat has eaten and rested, she's able to offer comfort to a lonely boy.

Told from the perspective of a lost and frightened feline, this picturebook about the transformative effects of hope and kindness depicts some of the realities of war in an age-appropriate way.



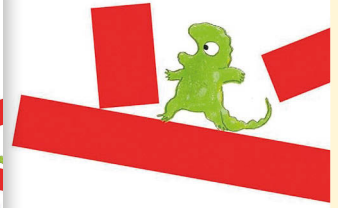
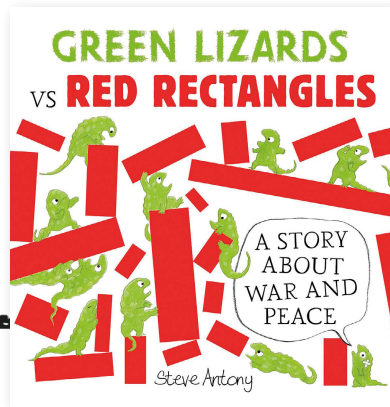
The Little War Cat © Hiba Noor Khan and Laura Chamberlain 2020 – Macmillan Children's Books

2

FOUNDATION STAGE

Green Lizards vs Red Rectangles

BY STEVE ANTONY,
HACHETTE CHILDREN'S GROUP



About this book

Why are the squasy lizards and hard-edged rectangles at war? No-one knows, but fighting continues until they're forced to find a way to co-exist. Their solution delights just about every reader: a bright red structure with plenty of white space for the squasy lizards... could it be a block of flats? Who knew that creative and co-operative thinking could result in such

an effective compromise?

This quirky picturebook is a great way to explore conflict and its resolution, and makes an eloquent visual and emotional case for peaceful co-existence. We all benefit from each other's strengths and differences; Steve Antony's light-touch exploration of complex ideas will prompt some thoughtful responses.

Thinking and talking

- Why do you think the rectangles and the lizards are at war?
- How do they eventually share their space? Do you think it's a good idea?
- What do you argue about? How do you solve your problems?

Try this...

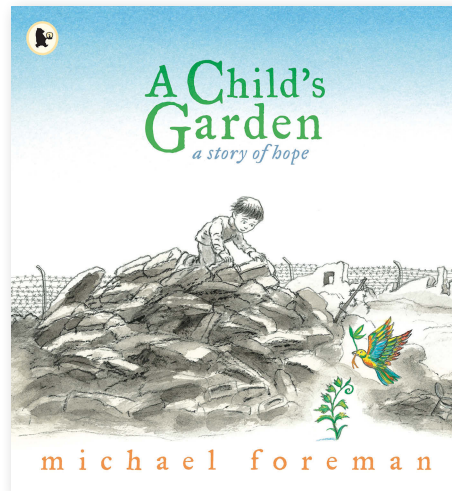
- Create patterns on white paper with red rectangles, then choose your favourite design. Draw green lizards in the gaps.
- Look at the final spread. How do the lizards and rectangles feel, and what do you think they're saying to each other? Add sticky notes with more dialogue, or role play their conversation.
- Use contrasting sets of paper shapes to make 'war' and 'peace' pictures.
- Talk or write about what you've done.

Thinking and talking

- What's happened to the little cat's city? How has it changed?
- Who or what helps her to feel better?
- Who's been kind to you? What did they do, and how did you feel?

Try this...

- Pretend you're the little boy. Tell the story of the day you met the grey cat. What happened next?
- Paint a picture of the cat. How does she feel when people are kind to her? How does she feel when she's kind to the boy? Work together to list words, then write them around your picture.
- 'A little kindness goes a long way...' Share examples of being kind. Can you decide who benefits from the kindness? Maybe there's a ripple effect, where the kindness is passed on? Record your ideas in pictures and words.



KEY STAGE 1

3

A Child's Garden: A Story of Hope

BY MICHAEL FOREMAN,
WALKER BOOKS

About this book

When a boy spots a green shoot in rubble near a fence, he nurtures it; only to see it destroyed by soldiers. But it isn't dead, and with help from a child on the other side of the fence, it is reborn.

Set in a landscape of ruined houses and barbed wire, this classic picturebook depicts the desolation of war. Monochrome pencil drawings of the boy and his bleak environment are brought to life by the colours and vibrancy of the vines that no-one – not even a soldier – can destroy.

Thinking and talking

- What could have happened before this story began? Why is the fence there? Share ideas.
- 'Roots are deep and seeds spread.' When does the boy say this? What does he mean?
- Have you ever watched something grow? Do you have a special outdoor place that you love?



Try this...

- Bring vitality and hope to images of monochrome landscapes by adding coloured vines and flowers. Imagine you're walking into your picture. Write about what you see, smell, hear and touch.
- Look at the picture of the family in their ruined home. What do they need? Who could help them? Research the work of the Red Cross/Crescent and other charities.
- Could you plant a flower tub in school for everyone to enjoy, or transform an outdoor area by creating a small garden? Work together to implement your plan.

4

KEY STAGE 1

The General

BY JANET CHARTERS, ILLUS. MICHAEL FOREMAN, TEMPLAR BOOKS

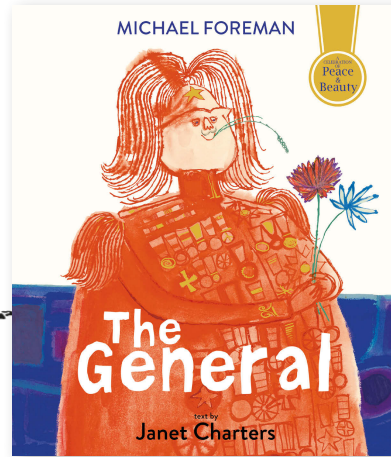
About this book

A much-decorated general demands daily shooting practice and rules his army with precision. The scene seems set for military confrontation. Until he falls off his horse in a grassy meadow, notices the flowers and the bees, and experiences a change of heart that affects everyone.

This 'celebration of peace and beauty' was first published in 1961, during the Cold War, but its powerful message remains as relevant as ever.

Thinking and talking

- General Jodhpur wanted to be so famous that someone would write a book about him. Would the story in this book have surprised him? How?
- Did the soldiers want to go to war? What do they do instead, and how do you think they feel about it?
- Could your school be more peaceful? Share ideas for change, then try them out.

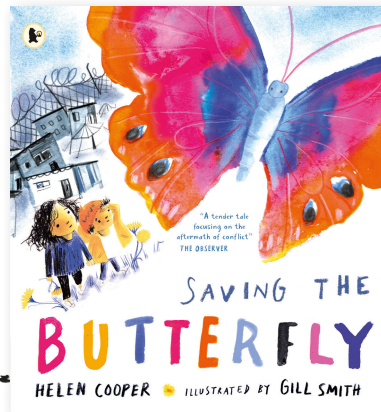


KEY STAGE 1

5

Saving the Butterfly

BY HELEN COOPER, ILLUS. GILL SMITH, WALKER BOOKS



About this book

Two siblings are rescued from a capsized boat and taken to a camp. The little one is soon playing out with friends, but his big sister won't leave their hut. When a butterfly becomes trapped indoors, she must decide whether to leave it to its fate or offer help. Will she find the courage to take the butterfly outside?

The children's trauma is not defined or shown in this moving picturebook, but readers are invited to

empathise with its impact as the lyrical text and expressive artwork take them to the story's heart.

Thinking and talking

- Why doesn't the girl want to go outside? How does the butterfly help?
- What do you most enjoy about playing outside with your friends?
- Have you ever felt afraid of doing something? What happened next?



There were two of them left in the boat.

A little one and a bigger one.

Brother and sister, lost in the dark sea.

They could have died.

The bigger one thought they wouldn't survive.

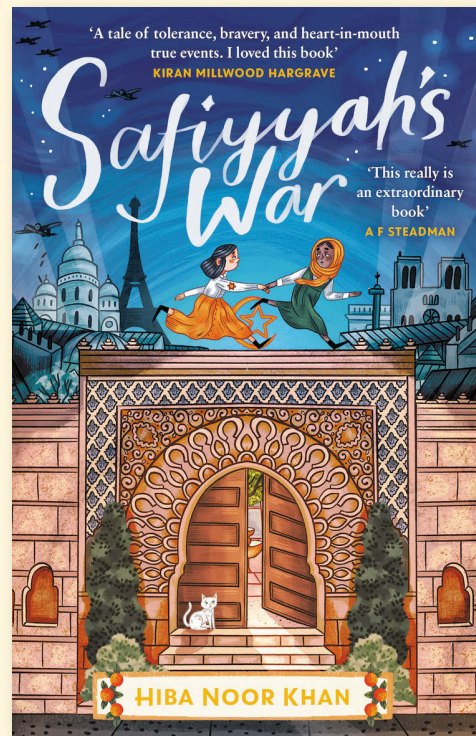


Try this...

- If the three generals came to your school, what would they admire? Go on a tour of inspection and make notes. Then write and illustrate a report about the good things you've noticed.
- Paint flowers from observation, then collage them on a frieze to create a meadow scene. Draw

yourselves looking happy, like the General. Add everyone's portraits to your display.

- Discuss how the General feels and what he's thinking on the first and final spreads. Write a letter from the General in the meadow to his younger self, advising him on why he needs to change, and what to do.



6

KEY STAGE 2

Saffiyah's War

BY HIBA NOOR KHAN, ANDERSEN PRESS

About this book

During the occupation of Paris in WW2, Saffiyah's father hides hundreds of Jewish families inside the City Mosque, where Saffiyah and her parents live. When the Nazis raid the mosque, the Jews must be led to safety through dangerous underground tunnels, but only Saffiyah can take the lead...

This exciting and involving tale was inspired by the true story of Si Kaddour Benghabrit, rector of Paris' City Mosque, and brings the reality of wartime occupation vividly to life.

- How did Saffiyah use her talents and interests to help the Resistance? How did she manage to overcome her difficulties and fears?

Try this...

- Follow in Saffiyah's footsteps by studying a 1940's Parisian street map. Mark the places mentioned, then print photos of Paris under Nazi occupation and display alongside.

- What does the text tell us about Baba's support for the Resistance? What can you infer? Write a journal entry from Baba's perspective, recording your actions and motives. Or deliver a speech in role, urging your audience to take action and explaining why they should.

- It's easy to become pessimistic when there's bad news, but good things are always happening. Research, write and illustrate 'good news' stories, and publish them as a class newspaper.

Thinking and talking

- What did you know about WW2 before you read this book? What has it added to your knowledge?
- How does Saffiyah's life in Paris change during the Nazi occupation? How does life change for the people of other faiths in the story?

Try this...

- Look at the picture of the children playing. Where and how do you play? Why does play matter so much? How would you feel if you weren't able to play? Write about your thoughts.
- Make big painted butterflies. Write sentences about peace on their wings, then hang them where they will make an impact.
- Collage a paper quilt using beautiful squares designed by everyone in your class or school. Does anyone in your community make blankets for refugees? Ask them to talk about their work. Could your class help?



KEY STAGE 2

7 How War Changed Rondo

BY ROMANA ROMANYSHYN AND ANDRIY LESIV, ENCHANTED LION BOOKS

About this book

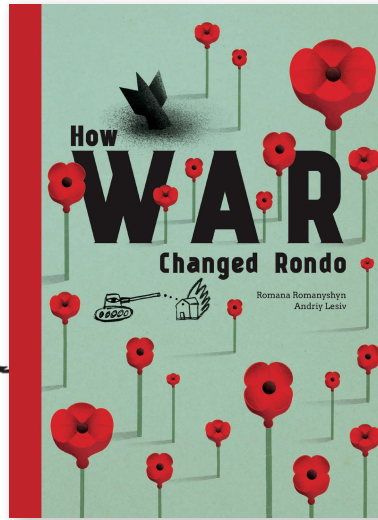
Danko, Fabian and Zirka live in Rondo, a town famous for its singing flowers; until the darkness of War arrives and steals their music. Danko, Fabian and Zirka try to fight War on its own terms, but it takes creative ingenuity, co-operation and beauty to defeat it, rather than brute force.

Supported by the Translate Ukraine Program, this powerful allegory speaks from the heart about timeless issues

with strong contemporary relevance. In the company of kind and eccentric creatures who don't appear strong enough to battle anything, children are encouraged to value what matters and work together for a better world.

Thinking and talking

- What impact does War have on Rondo?
- How do Danko, Fabian and Zirka defeat it?



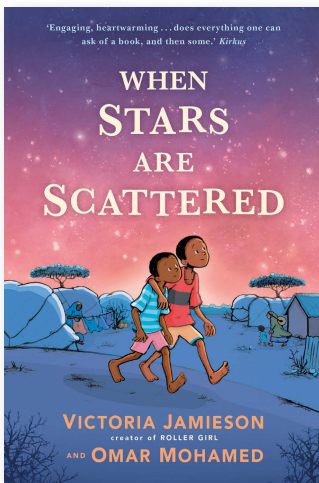
- What have you heard about the war in Ukraine? Has it changed your lives? How?

Try this...

- Rondo's anthem is Mozart's Rondo alla Turca. Listen to the music as you paint brightly-coloured flowers. What would they sing about? Share ideas, then compose a special peace-song for your flower chorus.
- What does Zirka see from

above, as the light-machine battles War's darkness? Record her observations in words and pictures on white paper squares, then fold into origami birds.

- Use the text, images and your imagination to build pre- and post-war character studies of Danko. What does he learn? How does he change? What would post-war Danko tell his pre-war self? In pairs, roleplay the conversation.



KEY STAGE 2

8 When Stars are Scattered

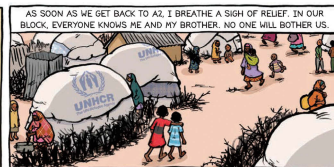
BY VICTORIA JAMIESON AND OMAR MOHAMED, FABER & FABER



About this book

Omar and his disabled brother have been at Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp for seven years. They want to go home, but while they're waiting – for their mother to find them, for the war in Somalia to end, for another country to offer them a visa – Omar cares for Hassan, struggles to get an education and dreams of a better life.

Told in an engaging and accessible graphic novel



format, this story is based on the real-life Omar's own experiences, and emphasizes the importance of friendship, dreams, hard work and hope. It brings the impact of war to life for children in UKS2 and makes a good starting point for factual research and further discussion.

Thinking and talking

- Has this book changed your understanding about life in a refugee camp? How?
- What impact does caring for Hassan have on Omar?
- How does Omar's life in the camp differ from yours? In what ways is it similar?

Try this...

- Find out about Somalia, Kenya and Dadaab. Report on what you've discovered using words and pictures, graphic-novel-style.

■ What challenges do Omar and his friends face? What attitudes, behaviours and skills help them stay positive? What could you learn from the children in this story?

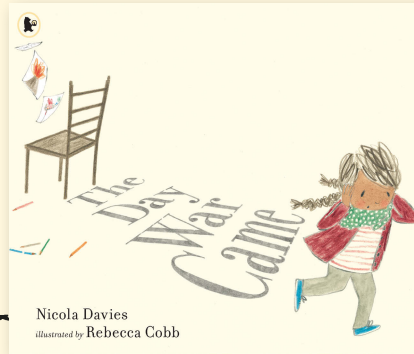
- In role as a character in this book, write a letter to your class. What do you want them to know about life in the camp, and why?

KEY STAGE 2

9

The Day War Came

BY NICOLA DAVIES, ILLUS. REBECCA COBB, WALKER BOOKS



Nicola Davies
illustrated by Rebecca Cobb



At first, just like a quattering of hail
a voice of thunder...
then all smoke and fire and noise, that I didn't understand.

About this book

When war arrives it's an ordinary day, but soon the girl in this story is 'ragged, bloody, all alone', and her long search for sanctuary begins. A school in a distant, peaceful country offers the promise of a better life, but the teacher turns the girl away because there's no spare

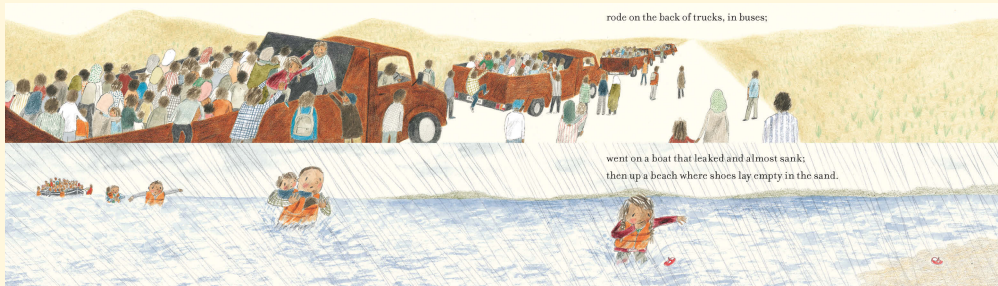
chair. Can the pupils help...? Nicola Davies' lyrical text was prompted by the UK's 2016 refusal to accept 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees, and a deep sense of outrage and injustice drives it. Powerfully illustrated, this moving picturebook will drive and inform creative projects across a wide age range.

Thinking and talking

- How is the girl's distress and loneliness conveyed?
- How do you think the teacher feels? Does she mean to be unkind?
- Talk about symbols in this book. How are they used?

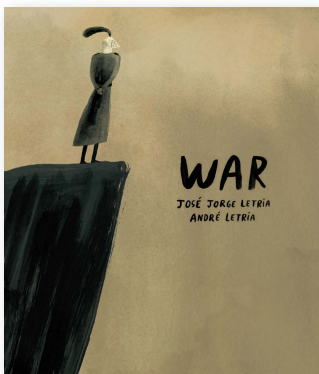
Try this...

- 'A chair for me to sit on... and drive the war out of my heart...' What makes you feel peaceful, hopeful and happy? Decorate your chairs, then sit on them while you draw or sing. Could you share your peace and hope with other children who need it? How?
- Use lots of different chairs to hotseat characters you've invented. Why have they left home? What are they hoping for? Working from observation, draw and paint the chairs and display alongside your writing about the different characters.
- 'Pushing back the war with every step...' Plan and take part in a fundraising walk to help children affected by war.



rode on the back of trucks, in buses;

went on a boat that leaked and almost sank;
then up a beach where shoes lay empty in the sand.



10

KEY STAGE 2

War

BY JOSÉ JORGE LETRIA AND ANDRÉ LETRIA, GREYSTONE BOOKS

About this book

War takes on the brutal shape of all our fears...

What is war, and how does it affect the people and places it conquers? In this picturebook for older readers, powerful poetic statements and surreal artwork in shades of grey and sepia provoke engagement and a strong response. Depicted as the shadow of a gigantic bird on ravaged land, or an onslaught of serpents, war brings misery to everything it touches, until nothing but silence exists.

Thinking and talking

- 'If children are old enough to be bombed, they are old enough to read about it' – Deborah Ellis. Do you think *War* is a children's book? Should it be more hopeful?
- Are there any illustrations or statements you don't fully understand? Could there be more than one interpretation? Share your questions and thoughts in groups.
- 'War begets shadowy, iron children.' What could this mean? Can these 'shadowy children' be helped? How?

or statements you don't fully understand? Could there be more than one interpretation? Share your questions and thoughts in groups.



WAR HAS NEVER ABLE TO TELL STORIES.

Try this...

- Who could the figure in the window be? What do they want? Why are they alone? Hotseat this forbidding character and create a backstory. Could they be defeated? How?
- Work together to plan, write and illustrate *PEACE*, a sequel to this book.
- Make masks inspired by historical war helmets like the ones in this book, or create your own designs. Wear as part of a spoken-word performance of this text. Include your own introduction and afterword.



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

WELL-VERSED

Verse novels are an accessible and effective way of introducing children to the power of poetry, says **Matt Goodfellow**

Verse novels are a fantastic, immersive way to get both teachers and their pupils feeling comfortable with all the ways in which poetry can move people.

The English education system's focus on exams has piled pressure on teachers for so long to teach writing in a way that ticks governmental boxes, that real creativity can often be stifled. This is a huge source of frustration for educators yearning to let young minds express themselves.

As a former Y6 teacher, I understand the pressures on both teachers and pupils each time anyone picks up a pen in the classroom. Poetry provides a different space where, I believe, teachers can facilitate creativity in writing such that children can really express themselves and write in their own voice.

Why verse works

Verse novels are succinct, to the point and pared down. They allow the writer to distil emotion into a few hundred pages in a way that won't overwhelm a young reader.

There are many, many incredible examples of verse novels published in the last few years that can be read in both primary and secondary classrooms.

Their approachable range of subject matter allows readers to feel that poetry can do whatever it wants to do and is not bound by age-related expectations.

How to teach a verse novel

I think the ideal way for a verse novel to be shared in classrooms, when budgets allow, is to use a class set, with children following along as their teacher reads. The beauty of this is that pupils

can see exactly how poetry differs from other sorts of writing on the page; how a poet makes use of space and form to convey emotion. If you don't have budget for a class set, you can use a digital copy of the book, or visualiser, to share the text with the whole class on a screen as you read.

Children will also be exposed to how writers can manipulate words and language in a way that can capture accent and dialect. In my verse novel, *The Final Year*, for example, the main character, Nate, speaks in the voice he has grown up with. It is far, far removed from Standard English. This is an excellent way to start



an important discussion in the classroom about cultural heritage and identity.

Encourage discussion around how poets can reject the notion that we should all be forced to speak in a way that was agreed upon by a small group of rich, powerful people a few hundred years ago. Very quickly, a class (and possibly a teacher) who might begin the book feeling nervous about poetry, can begin to understand the endless possibilities that poetry offers.

Building your verse library

I would always recommend teachers have a range of poetry to hand, from single-voice collections to anthologies containing lots of different voices. Children will gain most from this variety of material if they hear poetry daily, as they will then be constantly learning how

different poets do different things – all of it poetry.

There are a huge number of free poetry resources available online that can beam poets into classrooms for free. The Children's Poetry Archive (childrens.poetryarchive.org) is a fantastic resource, which has gathered audio recordings of some of the best children's poets and then stored them online for free.

“Verse novels are succinct, to the point and pared down”

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) website also has an awesome array of resources (clpe.org.uk/poetry). It includes over 500 videos of poets reading their work and talking about why poetry matters to them – giving hints and tips to

young writers who want to begin their own writing.

Award-winners

As well as this, the CLPE runs its yearly poetry award (the CLiPPA), which creates a shortlist of what it considers to be the best books of poetry for young people published each year. Amongst the poetry collections, there are often verse novels.

The CLiPPA is the only award solely presented for published children's poetry in the UK, and I'm proud that my books *Caterpillar Cake*, *Bright Bursts of Colour* and *Let's Chase Stars Together* have all been shortlisted for it. CLPE produces lesson plans and video resources for each book on the shortlist, which are free for any school to download on their website (tinyurl.com/tp-ClippaSequence).

The CLPE also runs a shadowing scheme, where schools send in videos of children performing a poem from one of the shortlisted titles. These are judged and the winners get to perform on stage at the award show, at the National Theatre in London, alongside the poets.

Being shortlisted for the CLiPPA and involved in all the activity around the award has provided me with a much larger platform and audience for my work than I'd normally have had, as well as an invaluable opportunity to work alongside other poets and writers. It's great to have the videos and resources from CLPE to recommend to schools, and it's always fantastic to see the impact of the shadowing scheme and to meet the winning schools.

Getting all kinds of poetry into the classroom is such a powerful and important thing to do – and verse novels are a perfect way to begin the process. Read them for pleasure in the classroom and discuss how they make the pupils feel. Let poets' voices be heard, in order to unlock the authentic voices of the young people you teach.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF VERSE

- Try to expose pupils to poems every day. As well as becoming more comfortable with poetry as a genre, they will begin to identify and appreciate the variety of ways poets write.
- Read verse novels as a class and for pleasure. Modelling the text for the children is invaluable in helping them understand how the poet intended their writing to be interpreted by the reader.
- Make sure children can see how poetry looks on the page as it is read aloud. If you don't have budget for a full class set of a book, use a screen to share it instead.
- Open class discussions about how poetry is like mercury, flowing whichever way it wants into any shape and space.
- Use as many available resources as you can to get a good range of contemporary voices into the classroom. Let the children see that poetry is for everyone.
- When teaching a new verse novel, make sure you read it before the children do. Verse novels often have powerful and difficult themes that you may need to discuss and think about as a class.



Matt Goodfellow is a poet and former primary teacher. His first

middle-grade verse novel, *The Final Year*, is out now.

WAGOLL

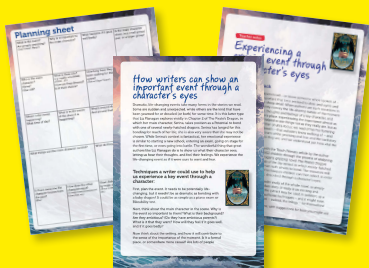
The Pirate's Dragon by Liz Flanagan

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to show important events through a character's eyes



Text © Liz Flanagan. The Pirate's Dragon (£8.99, UCLan Publishing) is out now.

DOWNLOAD
RESOURCES AT



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

[tinyurl.com/
tp-PiratesDragon](https://tinyurl.com/tp-PiratesDragon)

The *Pirate's Dragon* tells the story of two children who seem like opposites in almost every way. Serina is the daughter of the rulers of Arcosi. She's just bonded with a fragile baby dragon, when pirates raid her island and steal the eggs – and her hatchling! She doesn't hesitate: she leaps on the pirate's dragon and gets carried away to a strange new island where they do things very differently. Meanwhile, Raff Sparrowhawk is waiting anxiously on Skull Island for his mother, the pirate queen, to return with the eggs. Why should the people of Arcosi have all the dragons, especially after what they did?

I wanted to explore how two people can go from being enemies to being friends. Having two voices, with opposite points of view, made the story a challenge and a joy to write.

Serina is a confident, privileged person who must learn to survive on Skull Island, keeping her identity hidden. But beneath all her good fortune, she's actually lonely and isolated. As she and Raff care for their baby dragons, Serina makes her first true friend. The children begin to trust and respect each other. This helps them both to question their side of the story, and Raff finds the courage to challenge his strong mother for the first time. But Serina is keeping secrets from Raff – and they all come to light in very dramatic

ways! Will he still trust her when he finally learns the truth?

Throughout the story there are strongly contrasting views. This is the first time I've written with two narrators, and switching between voices became my new favourite technique, judging exactly when to flick between perspectives for maximum tension.

It's a dramatic adventure, with a cast of dragon-riders and pirates, but at the heart of the story is a question that's been on my mind lately: how do we talk to people we disagree with and find a way of seeing through their eyes? How do we listen to each other, and how do we find common ground? Raff and Serina have to work together to defeat a shared threat, in spite of all their differences.

5 TIPS for showing important events through a character's eyes

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHARACTER

Before I write about them, I need to get to know my character, to learn how they think and feel. I make notes and sketches to prepare. I like to use Pinterest to find a visual image to inspire me and help me bring each character into focus.

WHAT'S THEIR STORY?

You don't need to know every detail, but it helps me to have a rough idea of my character's backstory. What do they want?

What's brought them here?

USE ALL THE SENSES

Everyone has different sensory input – what is it like for your character? Do they notice sights or smells or sounds? Adding these details will bring them alive on the page.

GO DEEP

We all feel different inside from how we look on the outside. How can you show your character's inner self and how vulnerable

they feel? This helps your character seem real and encourages the reader to care.

MAGPIE IT!

Can you borrow a feeling or a trait that you've had yourself, or you've noticed in someone else? Don't borrow a whole person, but act like a magpie and swoop on shiny ideas here and there. The character you make will be totally imaginary – but seem real. No one else will guess which bits you have borrowed.



Find out more about this series at lizflanagan.co.uk/legends-of-the-sky

Extract from

Chapter 2,
pages 14–15

This scene sets up Serina's world before it turns upside down. Her focused nervousness gave me a good excuse to show all these details of the setting she is about to leave.

This long sentence with its repeated 'surrounded' is aiming to use rhythm to create that sense of concentric circles. Poor Serina - she's about to learn that this isn't true at all! It's normal to see ourselves as the centre of the world, but this story has two sides...

I love to use physical sensations to hint at emotional state. Layering thoughts, feelings, observation and dialogue helps the reader see the world through your character's eyes - it's the closest thing to mind-reading.

This is the only moment of direct speech here, and it runs straight on, back into her thoughts, to keep with that interiority and seeing the world through her eyes. I wanted to show that Serina is kind and thoughtful, even at moments of high tension. She doesn't have any proper friends at this point - but it's not her fault.

The Pirate's Dragon

And suddenly, it was time: everything sprang into crisp clear focus. Serina had never felt so awake, spotting every tiny detail that stood between her and those eggs. She was second in line, placed in age order, as the Potentials walked slowly down the steps into the open space that waited for them. Identical in their white robes, they sat down in a circle on the scrubbed cobbles, facing the covered eggs. All around them lay silver bowls containing springwater and shredded roast chicken: all ready to nourish the new baby dragons that were about to hatch.

It was as if the eggs lay in the centre of the world, thought Serina: right in the middle of the marketplace, surrounded by Potentials, surrounded by guards, surrounded by all the dragons of Arcosi, surrounded by tiered rows and rows of onlookers.

Serina let out a long, shaky breath, and made her face friendly and neutral. As the daughter of a duke and duchess, she was used to ceremonial occasions. From years of practice, she knew she could sit calmly for hours, without fidgeting. But inside, her stomach felt tight: with nerves, excitement or hunger, she had no idea.

None of the other ten children would meet her gaze as they settled into place, all except Hala, whose mother was friends with Milla. Serina and Hala had played together when they were smaller, and now Hala gave her a little nervous grin.

Serina smiled back and whispered, 'Good luck!' then bit her lip in case that was seen as favouring someone - she'd been warned about doing that.

I wanted to create a sense of how important this sacred ceremony is to the people of Arcosi. I layered visual details to convey that impression - from the white robes to the silver bowls and the ordered circle. The pirate raid will soon shatter all this careful preparation.

Here we get to see beneath Serina's mask - she might be used to hiding her feelings, but the shaky breath shows the reader the truth.

In spite of all her privilege, Serina is lonely and isolated - this will be one of the opposites about her life here on Arcosi compared to the life she is about to discover on Skull Island.

x-x

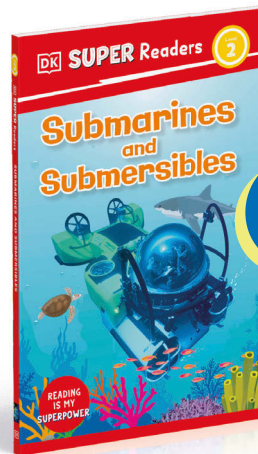
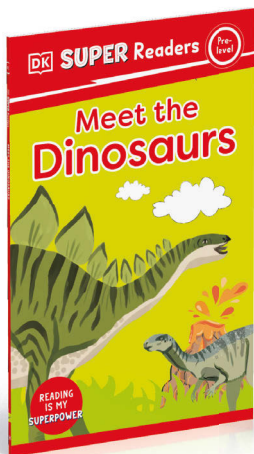
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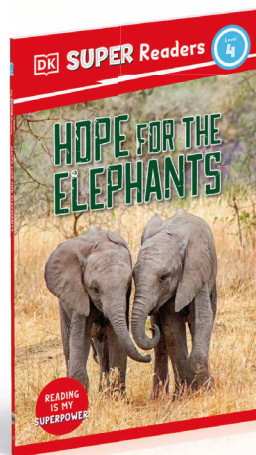
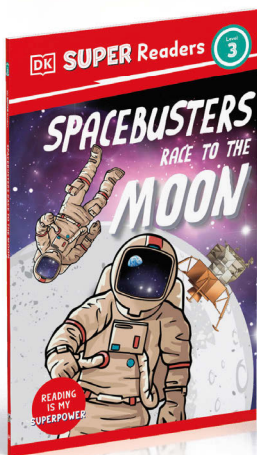
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SCREEN TIME

Simply turning on the television subtitles can improve children's literacy just as efficiently as reading lengthy novels, says **Henry Warren**

Did you know that turning on the subtitles while children are watching television can double the chances of them becoming good at reading? Yes, really.

Wonderfully simple, isn't it? Ten seconds of effort for parents, a lifetime's impact for their children. And all backed up by decades of scientific research.

As co-founder of Turn on the Subtitles (TOTS), the world's largest literacy campaign, I've teamed up with The Access Group to help schools spread the word to parents and boost literacy.

Our literacy problem

Research shows that 28 per cent of children – up to 45 per cent in poorer families – struggle with reading, while 250,000 start secondary school lacking basic English skills. Furthermore, nearly one in five children aged five to eight in England lack access to books at home. And for those children who do have books, only two in five say they enjoy reading.

Igniting a love of literacy

We all recognise how crucial it is to instil a love of reading books, and we wouldn't want to detract from that. However, by integrating both reading books and TOTS, we can double the likelihood of children excelling in reading skills.

Believe it or not, if a child watches just over three hours and 15 minutes of TV a day with the subtitles switched on, after just a year, they'll have read the same number of words that are in all the *Harry Potter* books, the *Narnia* saga, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and Roald Dahl's entire collection combined.

Of course, few would suggest that much screentime as a target –



“Turning on the subtitles while children are watching television can double the chances of them becoming good at reading”

however, while many might describe the battle of encouraging their child to put down their smartphone or tablet as a losing one, it's time to accept that this technology is part and parcel of our daily lives. We must meet younger generations halfway.

With almost everything available through a screen, children are familiar with using their devices to stream content. By asking them to simply turn on the subtitles, and explaining the benefits, children can learn new words and develop their language almost subconsciously. Research carried out by The Access Group showed that 98 per cent of viewers had zero complaints about having subtitles on screen.

The impact of TOTS

Backed by the likes of Jack Black, Stephen Fry, Sandi Toksvig and Lenny Henry, as well as other leading academics and influencers, the impact of TOTS has been huge.

In a small space of time, the campaign has gone from a kitchen table in Essex to the world's largest literacy programme.

The TOTS initiative led to the launch of Sky Q's Literacy Zone, which plays children's favourite cartoons with subtitles. Moonbug has also launched a channel on YouTube called

Moonbug Kids Literacy.

To date, these platforms now have over five billion views.

Everyone working across the education sector needs to understand the impact that simply turning on the subtitles has.

TOTS was initially aiming to help a few thousand children in the UK, but with this number only increasing (currently at 400 million), the target is now to help a billion children by 2027. All we ask is that schools, parents and the media share this incredibly simple but powerful message.

TOTS at home and in the classroom

Get started by downloading a free TOTS digital pack full of useful information you can share with parents to get them turning the subtitles on at home (theaccessgroup.com/tots).

In the classroom, use videos, with subtitles on, to introduce new topics. Having the option to read the subtitles will prevent pupils from completely disengaging from more complex subject material.

Finally, try to support different ways of working in school. Approximately 15 to 20 per cent of children and young people in the UK are neurodivergent. By incorporating short video clips into a lesson plan, pupils who may struggle to focus for a long period of time, or who prefer to *see* what they are learning about, will thrive alongside their peers.

To find out more about TOTS, and download a free school resource pack, visit theaccessgroup.com/tots



Henry Warren is co-founder of Turn on the Subtitles.

turnonthesubtitles.org

The facts **OF LIFE**

Rashmi Sirdeshpande explains how factual books can help children navigate the world

Growing up is a tough old business, isn't it? I mean it's an exciting time, but it's also full of challenges.

As they move up through primary school, children will find themselves having to get to grips with all kinds of tricky topics, from understanding their own feelings and navigating relationships to wider issues such as climate change, politics and fake news.

It's a LOT. I know. But well-researched high-quality factual books can help.

They're a powerful form of storytelling using words and pictures, and they can keep things interesting.

They can help children break down big ideas and spark thoughtful conversations as well as inspiring all kinds of creative work in the classroom.

Curiosity

Children are naturally curious. They *want* to learn more about the world around them and how things work. And when they discover something that WOWs them, they hold onto it. They share it. They're hungry for more.

That's why, when I was asked to be writer-in-residence at BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity, I knew exactly what my theme would be: *using factual books to fascinate young readers*.

As an author, I've seen how these books can engage children, making reading accessible and *irresistible*.

In so many instances, factual books can *create* readers. And there is a solid base of research produced by BookTrust showing that reading for pleasure can transform a child's life chances, countering disadvantages caused by inequalities and nurturing wellbeing, self-esteem, creativity and empathy.

We know that fictional stories can do this, but so can *true* stories.

Something for everyone

In this golden age of children's non-fiction, you'll find a factual book on every topic under the sun. There's something for every reader, on any theme you might

than you can say "Bob's your uncle", children need resources they can trust. Enter factual books.

They take an absolute age to put together because of the enormous amount of painstaking research and fact-checking behind them. For example, my book with Jason Lyon, *Amazing Asia: An Encyclopaedia of an Epic Continent*, out in October 2024, took over a year and a half of intensive research, writing and illustrating with a board of experts involved at every stage. We've dealt with some difficult themes, such as colonialism, war, and conflict, but in sensitive way. And we've taken great care to balance these issues with plenty of beautiful,

page as educators. We're all about encouraging critical thinking; a skill needed now more than ever in this age of disinformation and spin, and one that sets children up for life.

An invitation

As well as engaging children and nurturing curiosity and critical thinking, factual books are also an invitation to the reader. A summons to reflect, to think, to build their own understanding of the world – yes, of course, all of these things. But also to do something. To discuss big ideas. To ask questions and wonder at things. To *create*.

You can employ factual books as a starting point for exploring all kinds of themes in the classroom. You might use them to inspire art or

"There's something for every reader, on any theme you might want to explore"

want to explore in the classroom. They're available in every format too, from picture books, poetry, and comics to handbooks for older readers. And if you can't find the perfect book just yet, you can bet there's a writer out there furiously working away at one right this moment. It's what we do as authors and illustrators. We respond to children's curiosity. We answer their wildest questions about the world. We take big ideas and turn them into books.

Critical thinking

At a time when fake news can whizz across the world faster

celebratory cultural representation from across the continent.

Children's bookmakers have a huge responsibility towards our readers so we work our socks off to ensure that our books are exciting and interesting, but also accurate, age-appropriate, and (increasingly) as inclusive as possible. And we have a rule – we don't tell children what to think. We set out the facts and offer them to the reader who can then turn them over in their minds, consider them, pull them apart, and form their own opinions. That's where the magic is. Here, we're entirely on the same



creative writing across the curriculum. Or you might want to encourage pupils to dive into their own research, questioning what they see, hear and read, finding the best sources, and breaking down issues, events, and ideas to share with others. Factual books are a conversation-starter – a launchpad.

Where you take things is entirely up to you. I've visited enough schools to know that *you* know your pupils better than anyone.

A shift

The best factual books will shift something inside a reader. After reading books about big issues, children may begin to see things differently. Perhaps they will begin to consider the world from new perspectives. Maybe something they weren't sure about before suddenly seems so much clearer. Or they begin to have a better understanding of themselves and the people around them. Maybe they feel moved to bring about some kind of change within themselves or in the wider world. Or perhaps the

shift is more subtle,
but just as powerful.

Like a child
who doesn't
consider

themselves a reader being drawn to a book... and then another and another.

My love of reading and of learning began with factual books. So I get it. I really do. And that shift in thinking? It unlocks so much.

Factual books can be incredible and much-needed levellers in an intensely unequal world. Through these books, children can learn more about themselves and others. They can travel through time and across the planet, meet heroes of all kinds, and they can be and do and wrap their brains around anything and everything. That's a big promise, I know. A hard sell. But I believe it with all my heart. I've seen it, and I know many of you have too. Growing up is hard. The world is big and there's so much to learn. But these children have you.

And a whole wealth of knowledge at their fingertips.

Ideas for using factual books in the classroom

- Include non-fiction in the choice of books available for free reading. Choice is key. BookTrust has curated booklists to help.
- Let students buddy up and choose factual books that they can explore and discuss together.
- Create a 'Fascinating Facts' board where students can share the interesting things they come across in non-fiction books or in news magazines.
- Use factual books to support children when teaching big themes: from climate change to navigating relationships.
- Use factual books to inspire art, about a role model, historical moment or movement. Or to prompt pieces of creative writing such as poems and diary entries.
- Explore the concept of activism through books and use it as a launchpad for letter-writing based on the big issues that affect children.
- Follow BookTrust's social media channels for more content from me around factual books throughout my residency (until the end of August 2024). BookTrust's website also offers content curated for primary schools, including resources and ideas for encouraging reading for pleasure at home and in the classroom (booktrust.org.uk).



Rashmi Sirdeshpande is BookTrust's writer-in-residence. She's an award-winning children's author who writes a happy mix of fiction and non-fiction.

✕ @rashmiwriting

✕ @Booktrust

📄 booktrust.org.uk

LET IT GO

How to assess writing by ignoring the assessment criteria

CHRIS YOULES

If a child in your Y6 class struggles with fractions, you have to unpick years of maths teaching to find where their misconceptions lie. It's hard, but there are teachers across the world doing this daily.

We're often asked to assess other subjects based on little (and sometimes not very useful) information. None of us would be that surprised to be presented with a five-point assessment scale to determine, based on a two-week slipper-making unit we taught last October, whether our pupils have mastery or greater depth in Design and Technology.

However, writing should be the easiest thing we assess in school: when a pupil produces a piece of writing, all their learning and knowledge is laid before us. Over the years, though, we've managed to muddy the waters and design systems that overcomplicate our assessment frameworks to the point that they lead our teaching.

On the wrong track

In my years of working with schools to improve their writing, I've seen countless examples of lessons planned so that teachers can assess against an assessment strand rather than designed to improve pupils' writing. These lessons are carried

out even though the feature is irrelevant or makes the writing poorer.

I've observed poetry lessons where every line had to start with a fronted adverbial, and a story-writing unit that focused on subordinate clauses. My personal favourite was a Great Fire of London model text that had Samuel Pepys spotting the fire outside his house and reaching for his 'woolliest' and 'warmest' jumper. The '-est' suffixes had to be highlighted for Year 2 moderation to reach the expected writing standard, you see.

I have nothing against fronted adverbials, subordinate clauses and suffixes, but these should be taught in context and purposefully.

These problems with assessment aren't the teacher's fault; I've been presented with assessment strands in schools that run over several pages. In one case, I counted fifty-two writing strands I was supposed to assess each piece of writing against. This is impossible, and I fear we have fallen through the looking glass when

assessing writing.

So let's strip it all back and return to what writing is for: communication.

What to do?

Every school will continue to have their own assessment systems, but you will find that if you teach writing well in a contextualised and well-sequenced manner, you'll

cover all the strands you need to.



“When a pupil produces a piece of writing, all their learning and knowledge is laid before us”

Let’s take the Year 6 writing assessment framework (STA, 2018, p.5) as an example. Here are the strands pupils are assessed against to reach the expected standard. (I’ve removed the spelling and handwriting strands as they should be ongoing throughout a pupil’s time in the settings.)

The pupil can:

- write effectively for a range of purposes and audiences, selecting language that shows good awareness of the reader (e.g. the use of the first person in a diary; direct address in instructions, and persuasive writing)
- in narratives, describe settings, characters and atmosphere
- integrate dialogue in narratives to convey character and advance the action
- select vocabulary and grammatical structures that reflect what the writing requires, doing this mostly appropriately (e.g. using contracted forms in dialogues in narrative; using passive verbs to affect how information is presented; using modal verbs to suggest degrees of possibility)
- use a range of devices to build cohesion (e.g.

conjunctions, adverbials of time and place, pronouns, synonyms) within and across paragraphs

- use verb tenses consistently and correctly throughout their writing
- use the range of punctuation taught at Key Stage 2 mostly correctly (e.g. inverted commas and other punctuation to indicate direct speech)

Looking at that list, we can ignore the technical details and pick out just the key phrases: *write effectively, awareness of the reader, appropriate vocabulary choices, cohesion, consistent verb tenses and punctuation.*

Note that cohesion in particular is vital in writing. When a piece loses its cohesion through fragmented sentences, incomplete thoughts, imprecise word choices or poor punctuation, it loses its ability to communicate.

Staying in the right lane

As a moderator (and I’m sure you, as a teacher) reading an independent piece of writing, I know when it is hitting the expected standard. I then have the easy job of checking through my lists to evidence this. However, bizarre assessment choices are made when we are too tied to our assessment criteria.

Countless times, I’ve seen evidence highlighted for subordinate clauses in a pupil’s writing where the sentence was a fragment and grammatically incorrect. I’ve seen numerous semi-colons ticked off, but only a few used correctly.

On the flip side, I’ve seen teachers not highlight modal verbs and put a child at a ‘working towards the expected standard’, when a quick read through the pupil’s writing showed me immediately that it contained many modal verbs.

One exasperated Year 6 teacher once informed me at a moderation meeting that her whole class would be assessed as the ‘working towards the expected standard’ as they hadn’t a clue about complicated grammatical structures such as coordinating conjunctions. She was relieved when I told her a few ‘and’ sentences would do the job.

As teachers, we must read children’s writing and consider what we love about it, what didn’t work, and how each pupil can improve what they have written.



Chris Youles is the author of the bestselling books

Sentence Models for Creative Writing and Teaching Story Writing in Primary. A classroom teacher with 19 years of experience, he has been an assistant head, English lead, writing moderator and a specialist leader in education.

MY PARED-BACK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

First check: Handwriting

Can I read it? If it is illegible, this pupil has failed to communicate with me, the reader.

Solution: We need to work on the child’s handwriting. Alternatively, if this is due to a physical or medical issue, they can type their story (with the spelling and grammar checking turned off).

Second check: Sentence construction

Does it make sense? Is the writing one endless run-on sentence with no punctuation? Are the sentences fragments? Is there a lack of cohesion? If so, I will struggle to comprehend it, and it has failed to communicate with me, the reader.

Solution: We must teach the pupil how to form grammatically correct sentences.

Third check: Interest

Does it capture my attention? Is this story enjoyable to read? Is the story interesting? If it isn’t, I’m unlikely to want to keep reading, and it has failed to communicate with me, the reader.

Solution: We must teach the pupils how to learn and ‘borrow’ as much as possible from the books they are reading and our model texts.

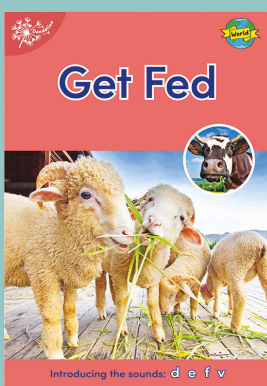
We need to help with various sentence structures, varying their syntax, using figurative language, precise vocabulary choices, etc.

Truly decodable books for beginner and older readers



Decodable books for beginner readers to practise their foundational reading skills

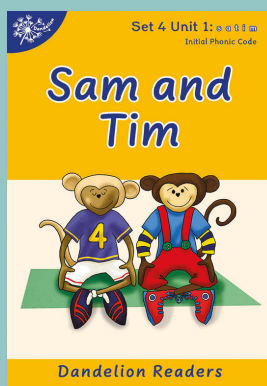
The Dandelion series covers the sounds of the alphabet through to split vowel spellings.



Dandelion World Stages 1-7 (14 book set)
9780241666333



Dandelion Launchers, Units 8-10 (12 book set)
9781907170348



Phonic Books Dandelion Readers Set 4 Units 1-10 (14 book set)
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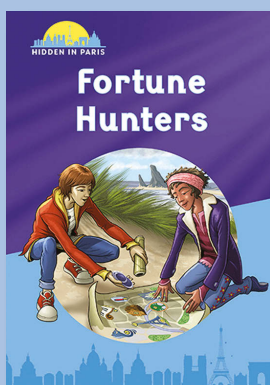


Dandelion Card Games
9780241684726

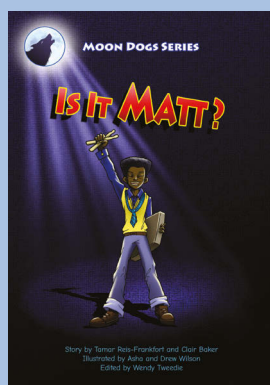


Decodable books with gripping quests and contemporary, age-appropriate stories to engage older students

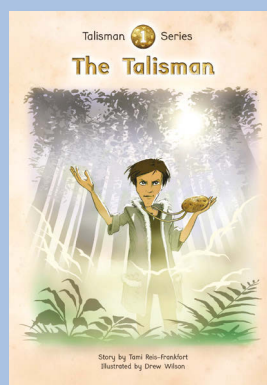
The Phonic Books catch-up series cover the sounds of the alphabet through to adjacent consonants, consonant digraphs, suffixes, and the introduction of alternative spellings for vowel sounds.



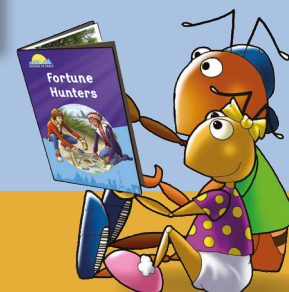
Hidden in Paris (10 book set)
9780241648940



Moon Dogs Set 1 (8 book set)
9781907170959



Talisman 1 (10 book set)
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Use the code **TeachPrimary** for **10% off** your purchase at www.phonicbooks.co.uk until 31 August 2024.

Resource roundup

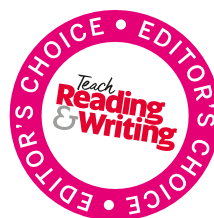
Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1 *In the news*

The Week Junior is the current affairs magazine that children love to read. It helps children make sense of the world, provides context and clarity to complex issues, improves general knowledge and encourages discussion and debate. Take out a school subscription to:

- Inform, inspire and stimulate discussion with topical features and articles
 - Develop critical thinking skills by encouraging curiosity and debate
 - Provide high-quality current affairs to nurture reading for pleasure
- schools.theweekjunior.co.uk

THE WEEK Junior



3



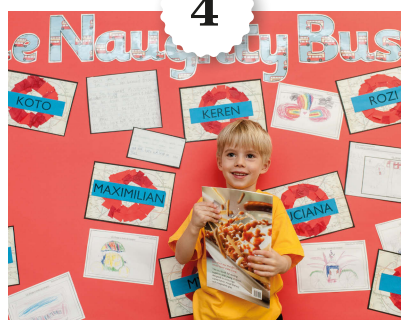
Scholastic for schools

World Book Day and the fun that goes with it is over for another year, but keeping your pupils buzzing about books and the magic of reading is essential if they are to build a reading habit. A Book Fair (tinyurl.com/3zy7xxyt) is a great all-school event to run at any time of year, and running a digital Book Club (tinyurl.com/2ctkt4pt) is a no-hassle way to help children discover and chat about new books. Download activity sheets associated with your pupils' favourite books to make the fun last longer. Prompt your pupils to read books that are series-led and related to their favourite characters, such as *Dog Man* or *Peppa Pig*. At home, you can encourage parents to create a reading nook with their children so there is a special place they can go to get lost in a book. Or suggest family activities that involve books, such as a trip to the library followed by a hot chocolate. Read more about how you can help your pupils continue with their reading journey in this blog post by literacy consultant Rachel Clarke: tinyurl.com/266jmzvw

Book-based learning

Used by over 50,000 teachers, Literacy Tree is a comprehensive and cohesive award-winning, book-based approach to primary English. Written by teachers for teachers and using expertly chosen, high-quality texts, children are immersed in fictional worlds to heighten engagement and provide meaningful contexts for writing using its unique 'teach through a text' pedagogy, which ensures all national curriculum objectives are embedded. School members have access to over 400 book-based resources for writing, reading comprehension and spelling, as well as resources for catch-up and home learning.

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4

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DK Super Readers

Enter the wonderful world of non-fiction! Children aged three to 11 will love exploring the exciting world of dinosaurs, animals, natural wonders, and more with DK's non-fiction levelled readers. With five levels increasing in complexity, the beautifully designed DK Super Readers cover engaging curriculum-aligned topics. Discover a wealth of accompanying materials to enhance the learning journey, all accessed via a QR code on the back cover of each book. With a book for every interest, young readers will learn more about the world around them and build subject vocabulary while progressing reading skills.

Visit: learning.dk.com/uk/dk-super-readers
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5



Mess-free markers

Looking for a reliable whiteboard marker that won't let you down? Look no further than the STABILO MARKdry marker pencil! Crafted from 100% PEFC-certified wood, this marker lasts up to six times longer than liquid markers and delivers bright, vibrant colours with every stroke. And when it's time to erase, MARKdry wipes away easily with a damp or dry cloth on non-porous surfaces, leaving no stains on your hands or clothes. Plus, the pack of four colours comes with a handy sharpener and microfibre cloth. Whether you're using it at school or at home, you can count on the STABILO MARKdry to get the job done! Visit stabilo.com/uk

Take it OUTSIDE

Want to inspire and support your pupils to write? Get outdoors and try these practical activities, says **Kathryn Brereton**

I'm willing to bet that, when you think back to your schooldays, it will probably be time spent outside or on practical subjects that have stuck in your memory.

Evidence points to the positive impact of learning outside, and writing experts confirm what a teacher's 'gut' tells them: that offering children rich, creative, practical experiences will improve knowledge, enjoyment, motivation and writing. James Clements in *On the Write Track* (Routledge, 2023) tells us, 'There are few things in education more valuable for children's learning than ensuring they have first-hand experiences' and the Writing for Pleasure Centre (which promotes research-informed writing teaching) says that children write 'because they are moved to'.

So, what might all this advice look like in practice then? My outdoor education adviser colleague and I put our bobble-hatted heads together and dreamed up a new training course. On a bright, crisp day just before Christmas, a group of warmly wrapped-up teachers joined us in the historic setting of Buckden Towers, near Huntingdon. Together we explored how they might use outdoor areas and experiences to stimulate a range of writing activities. We hoped that by the end of the day we'd have produced a gentle mind-shift: that folks' default setting would

become *how could doing this outdoors enhance writing?*

Here's an outline of what we did, with some suggestions of how you might adapt our ideas for your setting.

Instructions

We made hot chocolate and cooked Welsh cakes on small wood-fired stoves. As the participants produced these treats, I took photos of each step and scribed the language I heard used. You could audio- or video-record this instead, of course. These activities demanded the use of precise technical nouns and imperative verbs: spatula rather than spoon; fry, boil, or sear rather than cook. The photos could be sequenced later to give the text-type 'shape' of instructions using the vocabulary bank already gathered.

You could instead:

Look at the free resources produced by Wildlife Watch (wildlifewatch.org.uk/activities) and make bird feeders or brew dandelion tea.

Descriptions

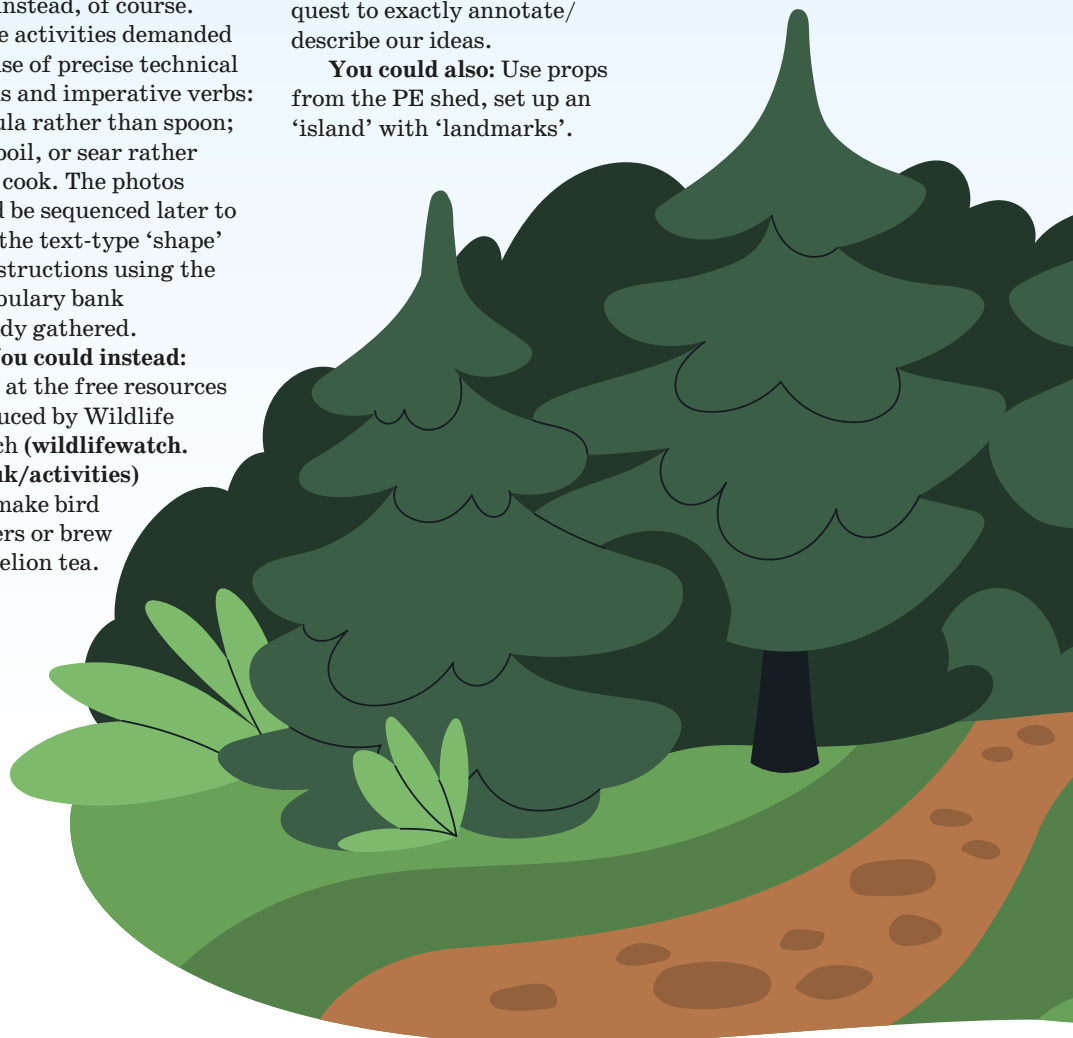
Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination work on projects with artists in the outdoors. One of their wonderful ideas is Fantastical Maps (cambridgecandi.org.uk/resource/fantastical-maps) where children re-map an actual outdoor landscape with their own creative ideas. We transformed a map of Buckden Towers into a series of magical spaces that were home to mystical animals. We stretched our metaphors and similes in a quest to exactly annotate/describe our ideas.

You could also: Use props from the PE shed, set up an 'island' with 'landmarks'.

Each prop is then mapped, reimagined and described

Poetry

We built micro-fires and, as we lovingly tended these, wrote 'long and short' poems, inspired by Michael Rosen's book *What is Poetry?* To paraphrase Michael's idea, you divide the group into 'shorts' (who can only describe what they saw or felt with one or two words) and 'longs' (who are allowed five to seven words). You then arrange the ideas as you



please into two shorts and one long, for example: *Flames flicker, sparks soar, Smoke spirals skywards in gentle clouds.*

You could also: Ask a pair of pupils to select a card on which is written an adjective (for example, *gnarled or blossoming*). Give the children ten minutes to photograph as many objects as possible linked to that adjective. Let them choose their favourite and write a descriptive sentence that incorporates the adjective on a sticky note. Everyone's notes can then be assembled to produce a collaborative poem.

Persuasion

We used apple-presses to make delicious juice. As they worked, I gave each pair of teachers a label and challenged them to name and describe their product as if they were going to

pitch it 'Dragon's Den'-style. A short task, in terms of number of words written, but a powerful one, considering how each word must impact purpose and audience.

You could instead: Make a 'magic potion' comprised of water and things found in the outdoor area. You could then market its 'special powers'.

"Think of outdoor learning as a teaching method in your toolkit, rather than a separate subject"

Narrative

As the late-afternoon light started to fade, I shared some evocative passages chosen to stimulate the listeners to draw on their surroundings and write a spooky story. *Seven Ghosts* or *Freeze* (both by Chris Priestly) lend themselves perfectly as inspiration. We played a few simple language games to get ideas and vocabulary flowing in a low-stakes manner, such as 'I went to Buckden Towers and saw a...'

You could also: Dot some props around the setting: a key, an old teddy, a single shoe or perhaps a lantern.

Texts that tempt

Across the day, I shared several fiction and non-fiction texts through which outdoor writing activities could be threaded. *The Tree and the River* is a wordless picture book by Aaron Becker showing how a landscape changes over time.

Children could imagine the same for their outdoor setting and write the accompanying text.

In *Run Wild* by Gill Lewis, children stumble on a wolf living on local wasteland. The plot could easily be transposed to your own setting.

I hope you've seen how, almost by stealth, the outdoor activities described can draw out the necessary components of effective creative writing.

The teachers on our course told us that their creativity had been rejuvenated. Writing can indeed be a pleasurable, satisfying, purposeful experience. Perhaps we just need to make this clearer to our pupils.

So, put on your big coat and get set for exciting times!



Kathryn Brereton has taught pupils across the primary age range and in a secondary school inclusion unit. She has also taught on creative writing courses for adults and is now an English Adviser for Cambridgeshire County Council.

✉ @kat_brereton

OUT AND ABOUT

- Think of outdoor learning as a teaching method in your toolkit, rather than a separate subject.
- As you plan a unit of writing, think how experiences outside might enhance the teaching and learning. What could be done through outside learning instead?
- Writing outside doesn't have to be a full-scale, wellies-on affair. Try these ideas to get you started: find faces in trees and describe them; imagine your outdoor area is to be built upon – write a letter of complaint; describe a bird's-eye view of an area.
- Use audio- and video-recording, or teacher scribing, to preserve the immersion in the activity whilst capturing the ideas and vocabulary.
- A dedicated Forest School area is not essential. I watched a class reimagine their Trim Trail equipment as jungle animals after reading *Lollipop and Grandpa's Back Garden Safari* by Penelope Harper.
- Capitalise on 'squirrel moments' – when something unexpected happens in the outside world and captures children's imagination.
- Provide each child with a scrapbook (or an 'outdoor explorer/adventurer's journal) and a large plastic bag (the 'zipper' kind works best). Here they can jot down snippets of language, or stick/collect treasures they've found, to serve as writing prompts back in the classroom.
- *The National Curriculum Outdoors* series by Lambert, Roberts and Waite (Bloomsbury, 2020) is a fantastic resource offering lesson plans for most subjects. There's one book covering KS1 and separate books for each KS2 year group.

Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

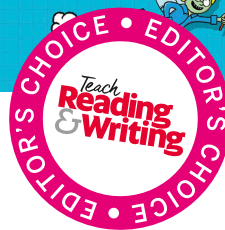
1

Fairy vs Wizard: A Stink Adventure

Fairy vs Wizard is the second book in the laugh-out-loud, cartoon-filled adventure series for 7+ readers, featuring the world's funniest fairy, Stink. It's by the bestselling author of *The Land of Roar*.

In this new book, Stink tries to help Danny with his lead role in the school play, makes a Malteser adventure playground in the science cupboard and accidentally unleashes a giant all-powerful wizard into the world!

The Stink series is perfect for children who love cartoons and fun-filled stories that tickle their funny bones. Readers can easily dip in and out of the story as it's written in the accessible diary-style format. It ticks the right boxes for all children and will grip even the most reluctant reader. <https://amzn.to/4brM76H>



2



RE focus

Faith in Phonics, is a series of educational reading aids for early readers. *The Faith in Phonics* reading resource, not only inspires children to engage in Bible stories, but encourages early readers to read.

Faith in Phonics is a provision that primarily appeals to faith schools, however, is a versatile resource that **ALL** schools can use and is designed to complement any existing reading scheme.

Written by leading educational experts Jackie Day and Dr Marlynne Grant, these books have been written using Dr Grant's **Sound Discovery®** phonics programme, which has proven results helping young children improve their reading skills.

Visit: rpbooks.co.uk/faith-in-phonics
Tel: 01420 88222

3

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The phonics specialists

Phonic Books specialises in truly decodable books for readers ages four to fourteen to build solid reading foundations.

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Each series has an accompanying workbook full of photocopiable activities which are easy to use in the classroom and provide an extra practice and consolidation of the phonics skills taught. To find out more visit phonicbooks.co.uk

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Visit tinyurl.com/tp-PeterJane



4

5



Books for all

Bloomsbury Education publishes an extensive range of books for Early Years, primary and secondary that help teachers to teach better and children to learn more. We have the curriculum covered with our classroom resources that make learning more fun, our professional development books that inspire your teaching, and our fiction that aims to get children excited about reading.

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Faith in Phonics

DECODABLE BIBLE STORIES

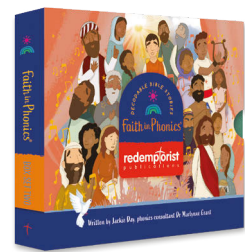
- Written by Jackie Day
- Phonics Consultant Dr Marlynne Grant

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Open the foldout

to discover how Reading Plus helped pupil Arun develop a love for reading.



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Bring some **‘KAPOW!’** to the curriculum

Comics are a much more versatile teaching tool than you might think, says **Lucy Starbuck Braidley**

With homegrown comic artists like Jamie Smart flying off the booksellers’ shelves, it’s easy to see that comics and their chunkier counterparts, graphic novels, are experiencing a renaissance amongst readers in primary schools across the UK. But how can schools harness this excitement for the greatest impact across their curriculum?

Something for everyone

As a starting point, get some comics into class and see what’s out there that interests your group. If you aren’t sure, ask the children – you are likely to have a budding comics fan in your class, who is just bursting to share the joy of their reading passion with you.

Comics are a brilliant way to support less engaged readers in developing a love of story and confidence in independent reading. Many children find the combination of word and image a satisfying way to access stories independently, but comics shouldn’t be limited to the less engaged readers. They cover all genres and challenge levels, and should be available to form part of everyone’s reading diet – including teachers’!

With the launch of the

government’s latest Reading Framework (July 2023), the importance of a reading for pleasure pedagogy has been placed firmly alongside phonics as a key part of a school’s reading provision.

Building a comics and graphic novel collection as part of your book stock is a great way to start making use of this fun and accessible format. Weekly subscriptions to comics like *The Phoenix* and *Beano* are a great way to build excitement in the library or reading corner, and

often present great value for money, as the copies are passed around the class again and again.

From great starter series like Mark Bradley’s *Bumble and Snug* or Ben Clanton’s *Narwhal and Jelly* (great for Year 2), right up to complex and heartfelt autobiography like Pedro Martin’s recent publication *Mexikid*, there is a wide range of titles out there to both entertain and challenge all levels of reader.

Say it loud!

Comics’ reliance on dialogue provides an ideal way to develop a group’s understanding of how well-written dialogue can be used to both develop character and move the action forward in a scene.

Take a look at some famous duos: Calvin and Hobbes, Tintin and Haddock, or even Batman and Robin. If you looked only at their dialogue, would you be able to tell who was speaking? How has each character’s identity been shown in their speech? This line of questioning can stimulate some powerful discussions and help demystify for children what ‘good writers’ do.

Alternatively, flip this task and prepare a comics page with the speech balloons blanked out. Ask the group to complete the speech, thinking about both character and what’s happening in each panel. These tasks can

“Silent comics can open a world of complex and subtle narratives to a much broader range of children”

be more challenging than you'd expect, and offer a great segue into developing the quality of dialogue in prose writing as well.

A space for silence

In recent years, wordless picture books have grown in use in the primary classroom, and the importance of developing appreciation of visual literacy and its role in reading and writing should not be underestimated. The comic equivalent of a wordless picturebook, the silent comic, offers another opportunity to explore the rich offering of visual narratives.

Silent comics can open a world of complex and subtle narratives to a much broader range of children. Though easier to access, the level of discussion that can be garnered from visual texts has the potential to be in-depth and high-level. Without the barrier that written words can sometimes create, discussion can focus on the richness of the material, the intent of the creator, and character motivation.

For a starting point, take a look at works such as Gustavo Duarte's *Monsters*, or Peter Van Den Ende's stunning comic *The Wanderer*. Although they contrast in style, both these titles excel in silent storytelling.

If you're interested in teaching art using silent comics, Little LICAF's free downloadable planning for *The Wanderer* is a great place to start (bit.ly/3QeAsyb). The sessions develop approaches to mark making inspired by Van Den Ende's iconic black and white illustrative style and build from there to produce a collective artwork based on the story.

Comics in the wider curriculum

Across the curriculum, graphic narratives can be a great tool for both acquiring and demonstrating knowledge. Various studies working with different age groups have shown that material presented in comic form boosts engagement and information retention when compared to reading a standard text.

There are more and more non-fiction comic titles available to support use of the form across the foundation subjects. Titles like Emma Reynold's *Drawn to Change the World* and Mike Barfield and Jess Bradleys' *A Poo, a Gnu and You* series, are just two examples of comics being used to convey complex non-fiction information in an accessible and memorable way.

Writing non-fiction comics in order to

demonstrate subject knowledge is another way to challenge a class. Elements of history, science and geography all lend themselves to being depicted in a sequence of words and image. You may be surprised by how details in the pictures demonstrate subject understanding. For example, children may pick up the wider historical context in the illustrations, or demonstrate the concept of a sequence by displaying progression between panels.

These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the possibilities for comics in the primary curriculum. Comics are a form that covers all genres: they can be silly and anarchic, and deeply poetic, they can present complicated information in an accessible form, or themselves be incredibly complex to make sense of. This versatility and range offers huge potential for educators.



Lucy Starbuck Braidley is the producer and host of Comic

Boom - The Comics in Education Podcast and is senior programme manager for Reading for Enjoyment at The National Literacy Trust.

 comicboom.co.uk

 [@Lucy_Braidley](https://twitter.com/Lucy_Braidley)

Just for fun



Comics clubs and dedicated 'writing for pleasure'

time, either in or outside of school, can provide a great opportunity to nurture reading for pleasure.



Use comics as a hook to bring groups of children together

to collaborate on a creative project. This offers a perfect opportunity to involve children who don't see themselves as writers, or artists, in the process.

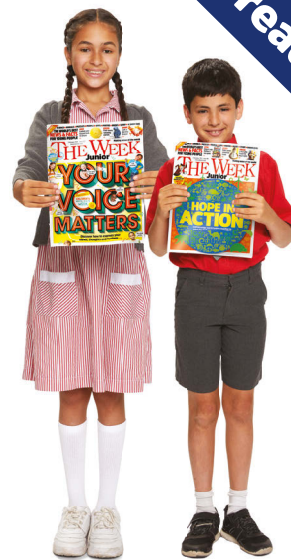


Embrace children's exploration of

existing characters from their favourite books, games and TV shows. When writing for pleasure, they should have the opportunity to draw from the stories and pastimes they love, to create whatever they wish. There's no need to start from scratch if they're feeling overwhelmed by the idea. This freedom to reinvent characters or storylines from existing stories and put them together in inventive mashups is well-used throughout the history of comics, and offers another way to break down the barriers that might put children off writing in their own time.

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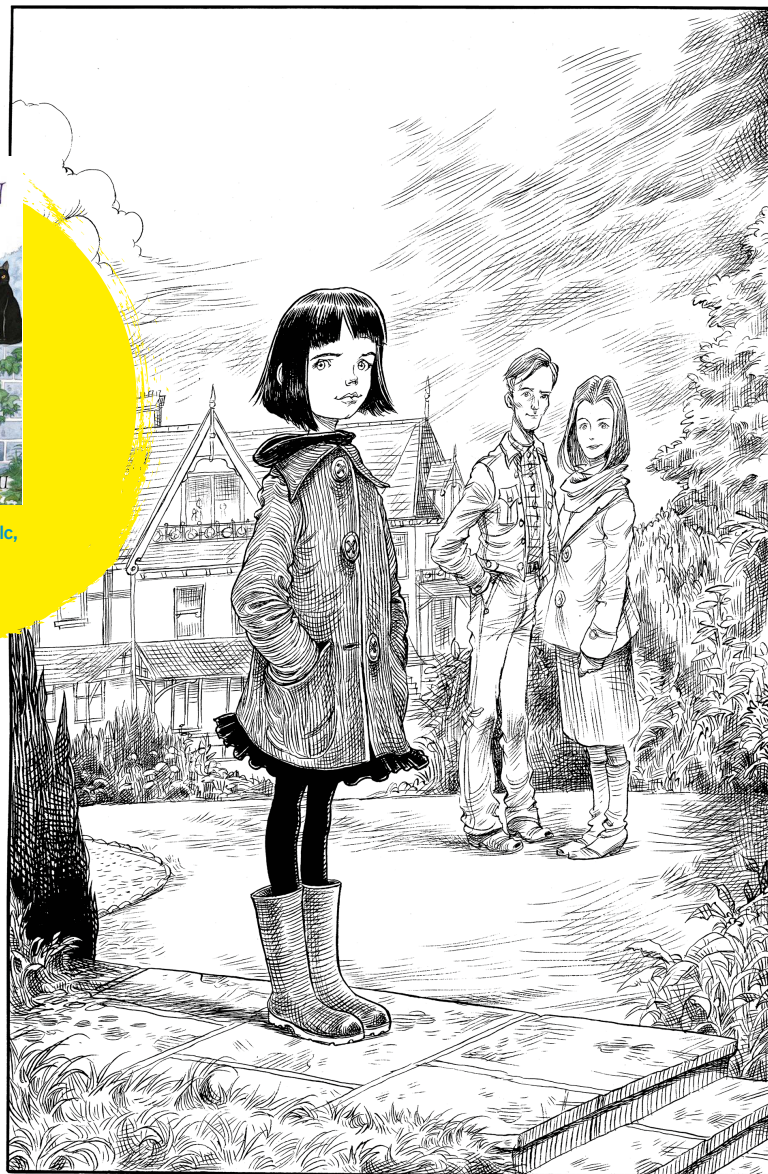
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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc,
2002



Coraline

It may be two decades old, but Neil Gaiman's fantasy horror still intrigues and inspires young readers

KAREN HART

Part modern-day fairytale, part *Alice in Wonderland* and part spine-chilling adventure, *Coraline* explodes with imaginative imagery. Never afraid to push the boundaries of the absurd to the brink, *Coraline* is a gift for teachers looking to explore creative writing with their children.

The story begins with Coraline having just moved into a somewhat mysterious old house. It's the school holidays and as an only child of busy

parents, Coraline feels bored and neglected. She explores the house and garden, meeting the eccentric tenants who share the house with her family along the way. Then, one afternoon, Coraline discovers the mysterious, bricked-up door in the drawing room is inexplicably leading to a parallel house, with an 'other mother and father'. Now the wild adventure really begins.

Neil Gaiman allows his readers to use their imaginations in building

their own versions of his characters by keeping physical descriptions mostly minimal – an interesting area to explore with a class. The 'door into another world' idea can be linked to *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*, which are all great stimuli for descriptive writing activities.

Coraline also contains many interesting big themes to talk about, such as: being brave – even when you feel afraid; the deception of appearances;



and the importance of being true to yourself. A great book, truly original and packed with creepy excitement from the off, it carries its readers on a wave of suspense to the very last page.

Talking about the book

- Coraline is the main character in this book. Explain that the principal character in a literary work is known as the protagonist; encourage the use of this term when talking about Coraline, to extend children's use of literary vocabulary.
- Words used to describe this book include: creepy, sinister, spellbinding, captivating and disturbing. Ask children to find the meaning of each of these words using an online thesaurus, giving an alternative word they think could

be used in its place, for example, disturbing – unsettling.

- Houses, cottages, castles, etc. are often used in stories to lend a particular atmosphere. In *Coraline*, the old, mysterious house provides a sense of spookiness. Ask children to think about a very different type of home, such as a cosy cottage. This time the atmosphere they want to create is warm and welcoming – how could they describe this? As a class, talk about words and phrases that could be used here, trying to think about all the senses, then write these on the board so pupils can make notes in their workbooks. Ideas for getting started could be: cosy, snugly, a warm fire, comfy cushions, the smell of warm toast, the sound of a cat purring. Pupils can go on to write a short description of a cosy home. A sample first sentence could be: 'Mrs Winterby had lived in our road all my life. Her little cottage was...'

- There are similarities between the story of *Coraline* and the fairytale of *Hansel and Gretel*. Do pupils know this story? Can they see any similarities?

Activities

How do you picture Coraline?

Explain to the class that, as readers, we can build images of the characters in books using our imaginations, with very little information on physical

appearance needed from the author. In *Coraline* we are given scant information on the protagonist's appearance. We only find out that Coraline is small for her age (eleven years old), and has a love of brightly coloured clothes.

As a class, talk about pupils' thoughts on Coraline's appearance. Some of the children may have seen the film version of the book, which could influence their thinking here; remind them of the importance of coming up with their own ideas.

Write some ideas on the board for the children to refer to, before asking them to draw in their workbooks a picture of Coraline as they envisage

her, along with a brief description of her appearance. Drawing the image before writing a description can make the process easier for pupils, as they then have

“Packed with creepy excitement, it carries its readers on a wave of suspense to the very last page”

a picture to refer to.

Pupils can go on to extend this activity with the characters of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. We are given a few more clues here, as we are told in chapter one, 'They were both old and round,' and in chapter two, 'Miss Spink was bundled up in pullovers and cardigans, so seemed more small and circular than ever. She looked like a large fluffy egg. She wore thick glasses that made her eyes seem huge.' Using this information, ask pupils to draw and describe these characters as before.

Take it further → → →

CREATE A SIDEKICK FOR CORALINE

Do the children know what is meant by the term 'sidekick'? One definition could be, 'a person, maybe a friend, who is generally thought to be less important and under the control or supervision of someone else'.

Sidekicks are not necessarily bossed about though; think about Batman and Robin, or Groot in the *Guardian of the Galaxy* films. Can the children come up with any more examples?

In the film of the book, Coraline has a sidekick named Wybourne 'Wybie' Lovat;

a slightly anxious, eleven-year-old boy who is a neighbour of Coraline, and becomes her friend. Can pupils create their own sidekick for Coraline? They can draw their character and write a short description of their personality, including why they think the sidekick would make a good friend for Coraline. Maybe they like exploring, or are good at solving puzzles, or perhaps they try to be brave even when they're scared.

DESIGN A FILM POSTER

Using A3 paper, if available, ask children to design a poster to advertise a film of *Coraline*. Pupils should think about the atmosphere of

the film rather than concentrating too much on the plot, as film posters are careful not to give too much away – just enough to get people interested.

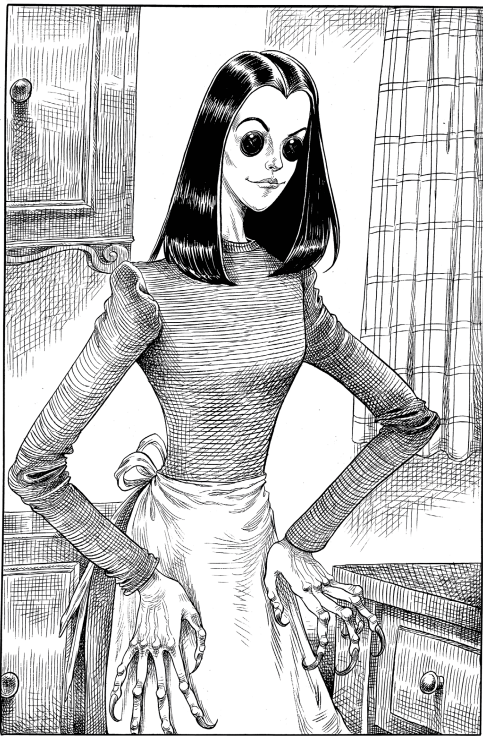
Ask the children to think about the important characters, events and objects included in the book. These could include the stone with a hole through it, the black cat, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, Mr Bobo and his mice, the key, the snow globe and, of course, Coraline herself.

Can pupils think of anything else that might be good to include in their film poster? Discuss what might make people inquisitive to find out more.

An internet search for 'images of Coraline' brings up some great pictures of

What's behind the secret door?

The magical doorway or portal into a mysterious world idea can be found in several well-known stories. Can pupils think of any books, films, or TV shows where they have seen this idea used? Some ideas could be: the doorway to the vanishing cabinet in the *Harry Potter* series; the wardrobe in the Narnia books; the door to the chocolate room in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; the door to the magical garden in *Alice in Wonderland*; the door to the magical garden in *The Secret Garden*. Ask pupils to write a short description of a mysterious door that leads to a magical world. Ask for volunteers to read their work to the class.



Being brave

In chapter five, Coraline tells the cat about the time her father deliberately attracted a swarm of wasps to give Coraline time to escape. Her father told her that it wasn't really brave, because it was the only thing he could do, and so he didn't feel scared. However, when he went back to retrieve his fallen glasses later that day, knowing the wasps were still there, he did feel scared. He said this was brave, because he was scared but did it anyway.

- Do the children agree with this definition of bravery?
- Do the children think Coraline told the cat this story to make herself feel brave before going to look for her parents?

As a class, talk about creating a short story on the theme of being brave.

Some ideas here could be:

- You are at the park with your best friend. There is no one else around and a big dog runs into the park without an owner. The dog is barking and chasing your friend, who is terrified of dogs. Maybe you throw a stick to distract the dog, hoping it will run after it? Or perhaps you grab your friend quickly and bundle them out of the park, shutting the gate behind you?
- Or, you could use a fantasy scenario, where you and your best friend are being chased by an angry troll. Maybe you could distract the troll by outwitting him, e.g. telling him there's a giant coming this way whose favourite meal is troll on toast, to try and scare him away. Or perhaps the troll likes games, like the Other Mother in *Coraline*, and you could challenge the troll to a

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman
- ❖ *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman
- ❖ *The Witches* by Roald Dahl
- ❖ *All The Lovely Bad Ones* by Mary Downing Hahn
- ❖ *Uncle Montague's Tales of Terror* by Chris Priestly

task – if you win, you go free! Ask children to write their own short story on the theme of being brave. A model first line could be: 'I was shaking with fear, my knees were knocking and my teeth were chattering, but I had to protect my friend from...'

Talk about the ending

Do children think the ending worked well? As a class, can you come up with another ending that follows on from the moment Coraline makes it back to her real house? Maybe the Other Mother uses magic to make herself small enough to climb through the keyhole and back into Coraline's house?



Karen Hart is an independent drama teacher, author and freelance writer.

f Karen.Journalist

Coraline posters for children to use as inspiration. Encourage them to include a tagline to advertise the film. The original movie poster included the line 'An adventure too weird for words'.

Some other examples to inspire children – can they guess which film they belong to?

- It ain't ogre... till it's ogre (*Shrek*)
- It's scumdidlyumptious! (*Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*)
- An adventure 65 million years in the making (*Jurassic Park*)
- He cooks. He cleans. He kicks some butt. (*Home Alone*)

If you have the space, use pupils' posters as a wall display.

WRITE A BOOK REVIEW

Start this exercise by looking at some real book reviews (there are lots of good ones on Amazon). Working as a class, talk about the structure of book reviews – how they will sometimes start with an interesting quote from the book, or the story's overall message, to grab the attention of the reader. A review for *Coraline* could start with 'Feel afraid – and do it anyway', or, 'Sometimes it's best to leave closed doors shut'. Can children come up with some good opening lines for their book reviews? Go on to give some pointers on how to structure reviews, e.g.

- Start with a couple of sentences explaining the story.

- Say what you particularly liked and disliked about the story. Include your thoughts about your favourite character. Did the story hold your interest throughout? What was your favourite part of the story and why?
- Tell readers whether you liked the ending of the book. Were you left feeling that the story had been brought to a satisfying conclusion? Explain why.
- Would you like to read more books by Neil Gaiman?

Also, read children the brief description from the back cover of the book (explain that this is referred to as 'the blurb') as a guide to get them started.



The BULLDOZER

Pie Corbett models how to rewrite a traditional tale as a quirky detective story

Hi. My name is Dirk. Dirk Magrew. Well, it isn't actually. It's Hamzah, but when we started the Magrew Detective agency, I thought I should give myself a new name. I began the agency after Miss Taylor's glasses went missing. That ended badly, as she had left them in the staffroom. I thought that we had a sneak thief in school and was caught carrying out a search. They thought it was me! Outrageous.

Since then, the agency has expanded. Hamid isn't the brightest apple in the fruit bowl, but he's dogged in pursuit of criminals. Our caseload has been heavy. We almost caught the kid who was breaking into local houses and wrecking the place when the owners were out walking. And we nearly got the robber at the Big House who had taken poultry and, apparently, a rare audio harp. Now we are on a new case. The press have dubbed this villain, 'The Bulldozer'. Though I suspect that bulls are not involved. Or cows either.

“The beast let out a mighty roar and leapt onto the roof”

The first crime was a strange one – an eco-house built out of bales of hay with a roof garden. Sounds snug. Destroyed overnight; hay everywhere and the residents driven mad with fear, mumbling about being attacked by something very BIG and very BAD. They reckoned a tornado had blown the house down!

Hamid and I visited the crime scene after school, last Wednesday. The house was ruined. Our only clue was a set of very large paw prints as if a huge dog had been on the scene. Huge – bigger than The Hound of the Baskervilles; bigger than Scooby Doo!

The second crime was even stranger – a wooden cabin blown down. Planks of wood scattered everywhere. It looked as if a wrecking ball had been taken to it and given the house a bashing. Hamid was sniffing about for clues, and he soon found the same huge paw prints again. The same modus operandi – that’s detective talk and means the same method, the same way of operating.

We needed more clues, and it was the local newspaper that gave us the heads-up. The owner of the eco-house was the brother of the cabin

owner... and they had another brother living locally! This was obviously a serial house basher.

That night, we cased the joint – more detective talk. That means we staked it out... which means we were standing in the cold and dark at nine thirty when our parents thought we were tucked up! Hamid and I kept well-hidden in the shadows by the bus stop.

Then we saw it. A huge shadow cast across the street and slowly approached. A massive creature, shabby fur and fiery eyes. Its jaws were open, showing yellowed fangs. Hamid whispered, “Werewolf!” and we crouched down. It paused by the house, inhaled and began to chant with a low hiss that made my spine tingle, “Let me come in!” The curtains twitched and we saw three faces peering out. The creature drew in its breath and, like a massive pair of industrial bellows, it blew. Trees bent double, the garden fence crashed down, a tile or two flew off the roof, but the house was defiant. It had been made of solid brick and stood the test well.

The beast let out a mighty roar and leapt onto the roof.

Like a vast, ragged shadow, it clung to the chimney and began to snarl: “I’m coming. There is no escape.” The shadow-creature seemed to slither into the chimney and pour itself downwards. I turned to Hamid, but he was rooted to the spot, mouth wide open as if he was catching flies.

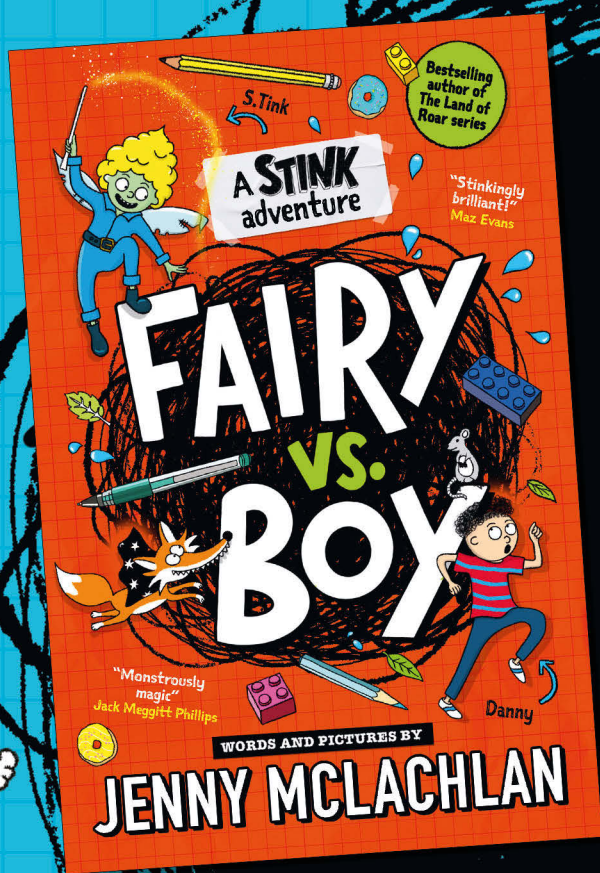
At that moment, a fearsome roar detonated from the rooftop and out of the chimney exploded the ragged shadow-creature, accompanied by a shower of ash and sparks, like some sort of furious fireworks blasting into the night. The creature landed in the garden with a thump, slithered onto the road and limped away with its fur smouldering.

The curtains twitched. Three faces peered out, grinning. We could hear clapping, hooting and back-slapping from inside. Our job was done. Not exactly a triumph of our detective skills, but we had seen the criminal defeated – and whilst a prison sentence would not be forthcoming, we knew that it was the end of The Bulldozer’s exploits.

"Sweet, funny and delightfully daft. Perfect for kids still building their confidence as readers" *The Times*

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FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE LAND OF ROAR SERIES

JENNY MCLACHLAN

TEACHING NOTES

Background

The Bulldozer is based on the fable of the three little pigs. Fairytales like this make an excellent resource for playful writing. The children already know the plot and can manipulate the structure for different purposes. In my detective story, I imagined a couple of children who have set up their own detective agency and get involved on the sidelines of various fairytale plots where there is an obvious villain. This would work well with the following combinations of stories and villains:

- *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* – Goldilocks (yes, she’s a villain!)
- *Jack and the Beanstalk* – the giant and Jack
- *Little Red Riding Hood* – the wolf
- *Three Billy Goats Gruff* – the troll

Getting to know the story

Reread the story a number of times and let children talk about their responses. This could lead into:

- Comparing the characters. Is Hamzah fair when he talks about Hamid?
- Which stories are referred to in the second paragraph?
- Mapping and telling the story of what happened.
- Hot seating both the boys.
- Writing a diary entry from Hamid’s or Hamzah’s point of view.
- Writing a 100-word news report on what happened.
- In pairs, role-playing any two characters from the story, discussing its events.

Writing toolkit

Work with the class to explore how the writer builds suspense when the wolf appears.

The suspenseful text:

Hamid and I kept well-hidden in the shadows by the bus stop. Then we saw it. A huge shadow cast across the street and slowly approached. A massive creature, shabby fur and fiery eyes. Its jaws were open, showing yellowed fangs. Hamid whispered, “Werewolf!” and we crouched down. It paused by the house,

inhaled and began to chant with a low hiss that made my spine tingle, “Let me come in!” The curtains twitched and we saw three faces peering out. The creature drew in its breath and like a massive pair of industrial bellows it blew; trees bent double, the garden fence crashed down, a tile or two flew off the roof, but the house was defiant.

Writing tools used:

- The main characters are on their own, in the dark, waiting for something scary.
- The exact nature of the threat is disguised by using words such as ‘it’ and ‘the shadow’ to describe it.
- The threat gets closer.
- The threat is described bit by bit.
- The writer shows how characters feel by their reaction, what they say and how they say it.
- The threat behaves ominously, chanting and hissing.
- The writer uses powerful images to describe the threat’s behaviour, e.g. *the garden fence crashed down.*

Task the children with using these tools to create a new paragraph for a different story, such as *Red Riding Hood*. For example:

She paused in the middle of the forest, quite alone. Shadows cast over her head and it was dark between the trees. Then she saw it. Something moved silently within the darkness, pacing towards her. It was grey as mist, had fangs like yellowed ivory and bright red eyes that seemed to beckon. Little Red shuddered and tried to hide herself, squeezing behind a tree. She could hear it now, whispering sweet nothings to try and enchant her: “Come here, my dear.” Red gasped and ran!

Shortburst sentences

Practise some useful sentence patterns with the children. For example:

- Describe your threat using a sentence of three. *It had a warty nose, hairy face and massive hands with sharpened claws.*
- Use an empty word (it, shape, shadow, outline, silhouette, etc) to hide what the threat is. A vague shape moved across the road.
- Write a sentence to show or suggest how the character feels through

their reactions. Hamid crouched down, clenched his fist and his heart beat fast.

Shortburst 100-word challenges

Take a well-known tale and challenge the children to write a response using only a hundred words. Here are two examples: what Goldilocks said to the police in her defence; what the prosecution lawyer said about Jack’s behaviour.

Convincing the cops!

“I just wanted to have a look officer. I thought no one was home! I walked in and I got a beautiful whiff of porridge. I just couldn’t resist! After I ate the porridge, I just wanted to sit down but the chair suddenly snapped from beneath me. It wasn’t my fault! I suddenly got very tired, so I decided to go upstairs and see if there were any beds. When I got into baby bear’s bed, it was so comfy that I drifted off to sleep. I got woken up by the bears!”

(By Rebecca from St Celas’s College, NI)

The terrible monstrosity

“I believe Jack should go to jail because he literally murdered the poor giant! He should be in prison! Jack has also committed theft: he stole the giant’s sad chicken and a precious lyre! Jack made the giant fall when they were climbing the giant beanstalk. This axe is what made the beanstalk cut in half. Plus, the fingerprints related to Jack and are definitely Jack’s fingerprints! Just imagine the wife of that giant! How much she has been through; she must have been miserable in that state! Jack should be locked behind those bars,” claimed the annoyed prosecution lawyer.

(By Ava from Wellington College, Bangkok)



Pie Corbett is an education consultant, poet and author known for Talk for Writing. His most recent book is Catalysts: Poems for Writing (talkforwritingshop.com).

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How to teach PHASE 4 PHONICS

Conquer blending and segmenting with this guide to building on previous learning, from **Emma Spiers**

Phase 4 phonics can feel trickier to teach than phases 2 and 3, because there are no new grapheme-phoneme correspondences to learn. This teaching phase is designed to consolidate and build on all previous learning, challenging children to read longer words, and a larger bank of tricky words, 'at a glance'.

Activity ideas

All phase 4 phonics activities should include lots of opportunities to blend-to-read, and segment-to-spell words including adjacent consonants, and words of more than one syllable, including:

• CVCC words

consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant
For example: *milk, desk, went, last, soft, chest, shelf, toast*

• CCVC words

Consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant
For example: *from, stop, plan, frog, flag, grab, green, brush, sport, crash*

• CCVCC words

Consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant-consonant

For example: *stand, spend, trust, twist, blink, crunch, shrink*

• CCCVC words

Consonant-consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant
For example: *splash, spring, street, string*



It's important to remember that the vowel and consonant digraphs taught in phase 3 are included in these words as a single unit. For example:

- **b-r-u-sh** is a CCVC word. The digraph *sh* is considered a single consonant unit.
- **g-r-ee-n** is a CCVC word. The digraph *ee* is considered a single vowel unit.

Blending and segmenting

We also need to show pupils how to hear adjacent consonants in words. They can find these tricky to determine, as some phonemes are more dominant in words. For example: hearing *went* as *wet*.

Pupils also need to know how to say the adjacent consonants in words. This can be tricky, depending on clarity of speech. For example: saying *jum* rather than *drum*; *chain* rather than *train*; or *vat* rather than *that*.

Begin by orally blending and segmenting the chosen words as a class, following the 'I do, we do, you do' method (the adult models the blending process first (I do); children and adult blend aloud together (we do); children blend independently as a class (you do)).

Keep the number of words limited to no more than eight, using the focus consonants for the session. Repeat this process by segmenting to spell the same words, using the same methodology.

Phonics in context

It's important that children learn to apply phase 4 phonics beyond the isolated word level, too. Every phase 4 phonics lesson should therefore include explicit teaching of how to read or write a sentence, including some focus words. This could consist of shared sentence-reading, or dictated sentence-writing, using the 'I do, we do, you do' strategy.

Another useful strategy is to read or write together as a class, blending or segmenting one word at a time. As each word is read aloud or written, the group should be guided back to the beginning of the sentence to reread previous words. This will significantly improve memory, training the children to check that

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what they are reading or writing makes sense.

Things to avoid:

- *Asking the children to think of their own sentences to write*

The objective is for the children to apply the words taught in a sentence, with a high degree of accuracy in spelling. Thinking of a sentence requires the children to consider much more than just that, stepping beyond the purpose of the lesson.

- *Expecting the children to read or write without a model*

This part of the teaching sequence is not an opportunity to assess the success of the lesson. It's a chance to over-model and clearly demonstrate how learning can be applied in reading and writing beyond the phonics session.

Securing phase 4 phonics will allow children to have a good foundational knowledge of the basic alphabetic code. This means that they will have a solid basis for successfully exploring the complexities of the alphabetic code taught in phonics phase 5 and beyond.



Emma Spiers is an author, early literacy consultant and trainer.

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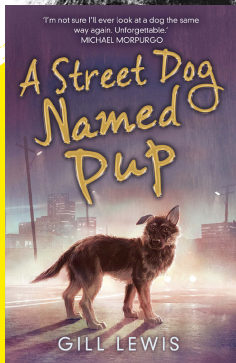
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© Gill Lewis



David Fickling Books, 2021

A Street Dog Named Pup

Gill Lewis' emotional story offers a memorable opportunity to explore characterisation and relationships in depth

JON BIDDLE

Every so often, teachers are fortunate enough to read a book with their class that leaves a lasting impression on everyone, children and adults alike. I've always been a fan of Gill Lewis' writing, but with *A Street Dog Named Pup*, she has created something truly special, a book that will be enjoyed for years to come.

It was the final novel I read with my most recent class when they were in Year 5, and when they returned to

me in Year 6, it was a unanimous decision that it would be the first book we would read together. The children enjoyed it even more the second time round, because they were already so emotionally invested in the characters. It really is that good; if you haven't yet read it, you should definitely consider doing so at the earliest opportunity!

At its simplest level, it is a story about a young dog, Pup, trying to survive as a stray after being abandoned on the streets by 'the big man' for being

too difficult and time-consuming to look after. However, beneath the surface, there is so much more going on. It is a book about friendship, loyalty and love, as well as delivering an extremely powerful message about the unequal relationship that exists between people and animals.

Pup desperately wants to find his way home to 'his boy' but has no idea about how to find him. He is taken in and accepted by the Street Dogs, led by the tiny but ferocious Lady Fifi. Each of the

dogs in the pack has their own tragic story about how they ended up living on the streets. Pup soon forms strong friendships with the other dogs; relationships and loyalties that the entire pack need to rely on when their home is threatened by the terrifying Fang and his gang of menacing Sewer Dogs.

I've read dozens of books to children over the years, and very few have the emotional impact that *A Street Dog Named Pup* provides. It's definitely a book that needs reading before sharing it with a class, partly because there are so many character voices to think about. The last time I read it, Frenchi, the loyal bulldog, was a combination of Ray Winstone and Danny Dyer. Clown, the impetuous boxer, was based on Boris Johnson, and Merle, the anxious border collie, shared quite a few similarities with Jodie Whittaker's recent incarnation of Dr Who.

More importantly, though, it also contains scenes of animal cruelty, which some children may find distressing, and so it is important for adults to know what is coming.

Activities based around the book

A Street Dog Named Pup is a book filled with opportunities for further exploration. We had endless discussions as we were reading it about the backstories of the main characters and the relationships between them.

Character web

The relationships between the various characters in Pup's pack are complex and nuanced. The animals work well together as a group, but there are some particularly strong friendships that evolve as the story progresses. There are also some less secure relationships,



perhaps caused by jealousy or a lack of trust. Creating a visual representation of these relationships as a class is a really good way of helping the children understand them.

We started by simply listing the dogs in the pack on a large piece of paper and drawing lines between them in different colours, which varied according to how close we thought the relationship was. We then added one or two words describing the friendships. If something similar were displayed in your classroom, it could easily be added to and built on as you reach the end of each chapter.

Individual profiles

We learn a lot about each of the eight dogs in Pup's pack (Pup, a German Shepherd cross; Frenchi, a French bulldog; Rex, a pit bull cross; Saffy, a Labrador; Lady Fifi, a Jack Russell cross; Clown, a boxer; Reynard, a foxhound; Merle, a border collie). At the start of the book, there are some wonderful character portraits, each

with a short description, which would be a great starting point for a character profile, as well as being perfect for further expansion. The children could include details about each dog's background, strengths and weaknesses, fears and aspirations, and friendships, both within the group and with other key characters.

Backstories

Each of the dogs has their own backstory, explaining why they are on the streets. Some of these are given in detail, some are just alluded to. Creating a short comic strip or piece of narrative around the early adventures of a favourite character is an exciting way to bring them to life for readers. My class were absolutely intrigued by some of the less prominent members of the pack, Saffy and Clown in particular, and were very excited to have the opportunity to add more depth to their lives.

Take it further → → →

PERSUASIVE WRITING

As well as being a phenomenal read-aloud, *A Street Dog Named Pup* asks a lot of important questions about animal welfare, including issues around selective breeding, hunting, puppy farming, dog fighting and whether it is too easy to purchase a dog or other animal to keep at home.

Later in the book, Pup also spends some time with a homeless man. Although being sensitive around these issues is obviously crucial, they provide fantastic opportunities for persuasive writing. A letter to a local politician about one of the questions addressed in the book would give the pupils a real sense of purpose for their work.

PROLOGUE

The prologue tells the story of Sirius, the 'Dog Star', the brightest star in the night sky, recounting the myth of how it acquired its nickname. The tale of Sirius is referred to regularly throughout the book, especially when the dogs are scared and need reassurance. They believe that, however bad things appear to be, Sirius will provide them with guidance and help. Comparisons can be made to how humans often use myths,

Story comparison

Several of my pupils were very keen to point out the similarities between A Street Dog Named Pup and another one of their favourites, *The Outlaw Varjak Paw* by SF Said. They really enjoyed comparing the antagonists (Pup and Varjak Paw), exploring the relationships between the secondary characters and debating whether Sally Bones' gang would ally themselves with Fang's pack if there were ever a crossover story.

I wouldn't suggest reading the books immediately following each other, but covering them at different times in Key Stage 2 would provide a fantastic opportunity for comparison. One of my class Reading Champions told me she was going to contact Gill Lewis and SF Said to ask them to write a crossover adventure, although I am not sure if she ever got around to it. However, she did create a wonderful



piece of dialogue between Fang and Sally Bones, where they discussed their respective plans to take over the city. This might also be a handy way to 'integrate dialogue in narratives to convey character and advance the action', as mentioned in the KS2 teacher assessment framework.

Figurative language featuring dogs

We enjoyed exploring the meanings of several examples of figurative phrases and sentences which were based around dogs. There are lots to choose from: *it's a dog's life*, *like a dog with two tails*, *barking up the wrong tree*, *dog eat dog* (which originally comes from an old Latin proverb), *better to be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion*, *let sleeping dogs lie*, *working like a dog* and someone's bark being worse than their bite are just a few. We thought about what they could mean and then tried to use them in conversation, often with very entertaining results. This

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *The Way of Dog* by Zana Fraillon
- ❖ *Moon Bear* by Gill Lewis
- ❖ *I, Cosmo* by Carlie Sorosiak
- ❖ *Until The Road Ends* by Phil Earle
- ❖ *The Boy Who Saved a Bear* by Nizrana Farook

could easily lead to creating a class list of animal-related similes, metaphors, idioms and phrases that the pupils discover in books they are reading.

The boy

The boy is the objective of Pup's quest to return home. Pup loves his boy. He misses his boy, and he understands that his boy loves and misses him in return. Interspersed between the main chapters, there are occasional short chapters written from the point of view of the boy. These work really well, partly because they help remind the reader about Pup's ultimate goal and give the reader something to hope for, but also because they reinforce how strong the relationship is between Pup and his boy. At the end of the story, when Pup follows the Great Sky Wolf up into the sky and is reunited with his entire pack, there is an excellent opportunity to create one final chapter from the boy's perspective, perhaps an account of their last great adventure together.



Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.

legends and stories from holy books to console and comfort them during times of difficulty. The prologue also links well to any work being done around creation stories.

SLOGANS

The majority of my class were aware of the slogan 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas', and enjoyed discussing what they thought it meant. We then looked at other animal welfare slogans such as 'True beauty is

cruelty-free' and the RSPCA motto, 'A world where all animals are respected and treated with kindness and compassion'.

The pupils then planned, designed and produced slogans and posters of their own, which were intended to deliver a similarly powerful message.

My personal favourite showed two photographs, one of a very cute puppy and one of the same breed of dog when grown to its full size. It had the caption 'Do you really

want it?' under the photo of the puppy and then 'Really?' under the photo of the fully-grown dog.

There were also a few that perhaps lacked some subtlety, including 'A cat is until you die, unless they die first'. I guess it got the message across though!

When exploring these campaigns, do operate with caution, taking extra care to ensure that children aren't exposed to distressing or graphic content.

Let's prioritise PROSODY

One component of reading fluency has been sadly overlooked in recent government guidance, says **Juliet McCullion**

The recent update to the DfE's Reading Framework, re-published in July 2023, contains a welcome section on the development of reading fluency, highlighting its importance in allowing reading to develop at a whole text level. The document rightly makes multiple references to accuracy as well as automaticity, stating that these are key to enabling children to read and understand texts.

So far, so good. Yet, buried within the 171-page document, prosody is only briefly mentioned twice, with little exploration of its meaning or significance.

There are three components to reading fluency: accuracy, automaticity and prosody. Accuracy provides the foundation – readers must be able to decode words on the page accurately to be in with a chance of understanding them. Automaticity tells us that readers should be able to read words on the page at a pace which allows the brain to focus on understanding. Mastering all three aspects of fluency – especially the lesser-mentioned prosody – allows us to support comprehension to flourish.

Prosody is obvious by its absence in many conversations about reading fluency. If we miss this vital component, we run the risk of developing expert decoders, rather than expert readers. Decoding is of course necessary, but

understanding texts is where the joy and reward lies in reading long-term.

What is prosody? Schwanenflägel and Flanagan Knapp refer to it as 'the music of reading aloud', highlighting the many parallels which can be drawn between prosodic reading and music. It is the rhythm we bring to words through phrasing chunks of meaning within sentences; the variation in tone, pitch, volume and speed.

when reading a text that is challenging for them, announce each word in isolation, as if they were reading a shopping list. They trundle through words without awareness of how they should be grouped together into phrases with meaning.

These pupils may also ignore the phrase boundaries marked on the page with punctuation, and read through them without

"If we miss this vital component, we run the risk of developing expert decoders, rather than expert readers"

As experienced readers, we use prosody as a strategy for understanding what we read. Think of a time when you have read a challenging text – perhaps academic research, a medical letter or something legal. It is likely you found yourself applying prosody, emphasising key words and amping up your phrasing, to help you to unpick its meaning. The techniques we deploy as expert readers are the same strategies we want our struggling pupils to have at their fingertips. So as teachers we must be equipped to support our readers with applying prosody at the point of reading.

It's likely you can think of a number of pupils who,

a second thought. Their reading has become an act of decoding, so making meaning from the text is not one of their goals.

Take a look at this extract from Jackie Morris' *Ice Bear*, with punctuation removed. It is transcribed from a pupil who joined the HFL Reading Fluency project, and who was struggling to apply prosody at the point of reading. Read it aloud, pausing where each slash is. What do you notice?

Words/ held/ a magic a word/ spoken in chance/ a wish/ or/ a whisper/ would hold a magic/ that would shape the world/ into this world they/ were born in/ the dark months/ when the cold/ and the wind/ turned water/ to stone/

Did you notice how difficult it was to make meaning? Did you spot that the phrasing became less accurate as stamina waned? Words were read in isolation and the meaning and beauty of the passage was lost. When asked questions about the text, the child struggled – as they had focused solely on lifting the words from the page. They, and many like them, needed strategies to support them in building their prosody.

What can we do to address this? An expert model is a good place to begin: someone reading the text aloud in a way that clearly demonstrates pausing at phrase boundaries and emphasising certain words. Echo reading can be a great tool to support those who need help with prosody. Alongside that, text-marking helps to make phrase boundaries visible. Ask the children to make a simple mark on the page to show where the phrase boundaries will be, and use these as a reminder to take



micro-pauses in those places as they read the text aloud.

Ask them to underline words that will need to be emphasised, either through a louder or softer voice, or a quicker or slower read. You'll need to scaffold this at first, helping them to find where to put the pauses, but over time they will be able to use this strategy independently to break down those unwieldy longer sentences into chunks of meaning.

Finally, encouraging plenty of re-reading will allow children to develop greater confidence and prosody as they take more meaning from the text each time they read. It's great for the accuracy and automaticity too.

After we'd covered the strategies above with them, the struggling pupil read the text again. What do you notice this time?

Words held a magic/ a word spoken in chance/ a wish or a whisper/ would hold a magic that would shape the world/ into this

world/ they were born/ in the dark months/ when the cold and the wind/ turned water to stone/

Phrased reading helps the meaning to leap from the page. Add to that an emphasis on specific words, and the use of tone and volume, and we begin to reveal the beauty of the text. After reading the text like this multiple times, the child was far more confident in discussing the content of the extract and ultimately comprehending it.

For children to choose to read, there needs to be something in it for them. Uncovering the meaning of quality texts through applying prosody helps readers to uncover the humour, the intrigue, or whatever provokes a reaction – which makes reading a worthwhile pursuit. Prosody can be the key that unlocks that door for pupils. Let's not forget it!

For more advice on how to support fluency in the classroom, you can download a useful resource that HFL Education have created in collaboration with the EEF. Called *What might fluency practice look like in the classroom?* it contains lots of practical teaching ideas (tinyurl.com/tP-ReadingFluency).



Juliet McCullion is a passionate primary school teacher turned enthusiastic

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PLAYING WITH PROSODY

Match My Time

As the expert reader, time yourself reading an extract with great prosody, reading at a suitable pace (not too quickly). Don't tell the children the time it takes you to read the passage.

Ask the children to time themselves reading the passage in exactly the way you did. Gather children's timings and see who has the closest match to your time. They are the winner!

Fill in the Gaps

Record a video of yourself reading an extract with expert prosody.

Ask the children to read along with you, then mute the video and allow the children to continue reading with their best prosody. Challenge the children to be in the same place as you are when you unmute the video.

“But where do I start?!”

Wave goodbye to writer’s block with these fun and effective strategies to get any child putting pen – or pencil – to paper...

JENN CLARK AND GAVIN REID

“I’m finding it impossible to get them to write.” Eavesdropping on staffroom conversations, we hear things like this very frequently. These cries from the heart are often followed up with complaints such as, “If I allow them to use their own text language, they’ll write screeds, with stuff like *2DAY, my Bestie, JSYK*. But they can’t use that in English tests!”

The usual response from pupils to a writing challenge is, “But I don’t know how to start.” Getting going is crucial in a piece of written work – I’m sure as teachers you have experienced this, many times over. So, we need to begin with what is relatable and interesting to the children, even if that is sometimes text speak.

Issues

There are many obstacles we as teachers have to contend with when teaching the English curriculum, so let’s explore the key issues and work out some possible solutions. How can we teach everything we’re supposed to while keeping pupils engaged and motivated? If we can answer this question, we’ll have cracked the puzzle, and the writing will surely flow.

Start early

Which age group has the most vivid imaginations? Most parents will tell you it’s their toddlers – young children often spend a lot of their time exploring imaginary worlds, and thriving in them. Surely that is one of the magic ingredients of the *Harry Potter* books – they take

children to a new world, and new experiences, which is always exciting.

So, the first key point is that it’s never too soon to teach writing, and it needs to be seen as an adventure. Let’s think for a minute about what makes a movie more exciting. The actors? Possibly. The story? Sometimes. The music? Always! So, let’s do this: play some background music to go



“Use all the resources available so you don’t have to keep reinventing the wheel”

with the theme of the written work. Now you are a director, not a teacher.

For many of us, the thought of teaching writing can be just as overwhelming as our pupils sometimes find the task of it. Make it less challenging for everyone by helping out with that ‘getting started’ part: give them a first paragraph, line or even just a word. And remember that pre-writing discussion (with music, of course), is a must.

Make it easy

We know writing is a complex activity, and that many subskills are involved; but the same is true for playing football, cricket or tennis. If you’ve ever taught any of those sports, you’ll know you have to teach them bit by bit, so each skill is practised – and that a real game or two makes it exciting. The same is true of teaching writing.

Joan Sedita, an American literacy specialist, has borrowed ‘The Reading Strands’ analogy and applied it to the art of writing. She identifies

five individual strands of writing that must be woven together in order to create a proficient writer. They are: critical thinking, syntax, text structure, writing craft and transcription (tinyurl.com/tp-WritingStrands).

Using this framework, we can think of writing skills in achievable chunks.

It’s not possible to teach children these skills all at once. Instead, start from an established baseline. You can then add each writing element sequentially, so that the skills build on one another and strengthen subsequent ones as they go. For example, in Year 1 to Year 3 the focus could be on expanding and elaborating sentences with building blocks of grammar, punctuation, word choice and spelling.

Over and over

When you approach your writing practice in this way, you are creating a strong foundation on which teachers further up the school can build and elaborate. By using a framework that elucidates all the different skills involved in writing, teachers can be confident in their own understanding and not feel as though they are underperforming or missing elements out.

Something that is often missing from the art of teaching writing is the explicit demonstration of skills. Just as in sport you would always demonstrate a

skill you were teaching, you need to do this for writing too. When children are exposed to writing tasks that are explained and modelled clearly, and where they receive plenty of practice, review time and feedback, they learn and experience first-hand the art of good writing. They will feel confident in their writing, even as the skills required become increasingly more complex and demanding over their school career.

Good thinking = good writing

The teaching of writing should never be mechanical and boring. Learners of all ages, when given the opportunity to explore writing skills through fun, interactive activities, usually become engaged in the process and excited with the idea of becoming an author. There are many examples of good resources online and in print that will enable you to run fun writing activities that can be applied in a class or small group setting or even in a one-to-one situation (for example, plazoom.com). Just as a learner can become overloaded if they have many things to consider at once, so too can the teacher. *Plan, prepare, teach, assess...* sometimes everything required of us can keep us from teaching a subject to the standard we want.

So use all the resources available to you, so that you don’t have to keep reinventing the wheel. This will allow you to focus instead on creating the right environment, with the right approach, to teach something as highly complex as writing.

QUICK OFF THE BLOCKS

- At the beginning of each session, provide a list of key words relating to the topic and discuss this vocabulary with the pupils.
- Help pupils to create personal word banks. It’s a good idea to make sure there is a definition next to each word, to ensure that the children can use it appropriately.
- Give children different categories of words to use, such as descriptive words, names, places, ‘feeling’ words, and so on.
- Use a structure such as the KWL grid: *What do I know already? What do I want to know? What did I learn?* This information can be recorded in three columns, one per question.
- Give guidelines for writing, particularly on the use of paragraph headings and around structuring a beginning, main part and conclusion for each piece. Provide plenty of examples of introductions and conclusions.
- Variety is important, so give the children a range of exercises that will prompt writing in different ways. Ask pupils to compile a list of questions they would ask if they were interviewing a fictional character on TV. Encourage children to draw a character or scene from a story and write phrases from the text on or around their drawings. Get them to write thought bubbles for characters at key moments in a story where the author hasn’t provided any dialogue.
- Create an ‘emotions scale’ to show the possible range of reactions characters might have at certain specific points in the story (for example, angry, happy, sad, excited).



Write This Way:
Structured lessons and activities for reluctant young writers by Gavin Reid, Jenn Clark and Michelle McIntosh is out now.

The place **TO BE**

Rachel Sligo explains how a new ‘Story Centre’ at Pegswood Primary is transforming attitudes to reading across the whole school community

During the pandemic, our school library became a dead space; unused, full of out-of-date books and in need of bringing in line with our pupils’ current interests and experiences.

As a teacher with a love of literacy and reading, I knew there must be something we could do to create a better space. Somewhere children would not only feel comfortable engaging with books, but where those who weren’t confident with reading wouldn’t feel out of place.

With support from the whole school and our wider community, including the North of Tyne Combined Authority, who helped fund this project, our Story Centre is now so much more than a library.

Transformation

When looking at the space, it was clear it would be hard to get children and parents into the library. As a result of Covid-19, we were seeing less parental engagement, and many students simply didn’t have the confidence to pick up a book on their own. In our local area, we have brilliant libraries, but even with access to these, only 19 per cent of our KS2 students visit libraries outside of school. So, to turn the library into a warm and inviting space, we completely remodelled the room.

We began by exploring the options available to help fund the project. As a participant in the National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for Leading Literacy (provided by the Three Rivers Teaching School Hub), I was able to

apply to the North of Tyne Combined Authority for support.

We were delighted when our application was accepted. We received £5,000 to support disadvantaged pupils and those disproportionately affected by the pandemic, which helped us with the costs greatly.

To ensure we didn’t disrupt the school, we worked over May half-term and the summer holidays, and we recruited help from friends and family to keep costs down. Come September, the new space had been created, our idea had come to fruition, and our old school library was now the Story Centre.

“Children who are less confident with reading can still feel comfortable here”

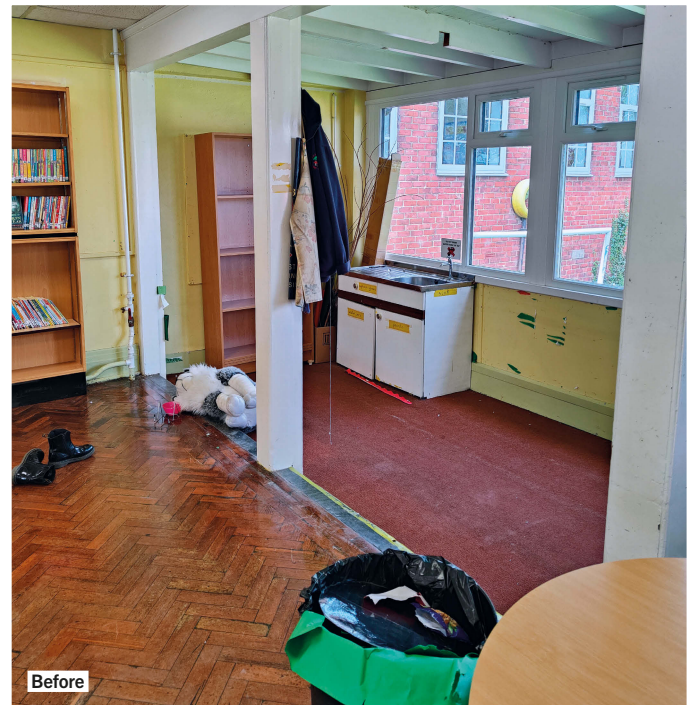
What is the Story Centre?

We’ve just come to the end of an incredible first term with the Story Centre fully up and running, and the activities and its impact so far have been wonderful.

It’s a comfortable space where students can be loud if they want to

We have tried to make it feel very different from a traditional library: providing a hub to engage families with every aspect of storytelling, not just reading.

The area is filled with visual displays. There are seating areas and cushions





loud learning can co-exist was very important to us.

It's packed with relevant stories, and provides access to real authors

We made it a priority that the books and stories we offer are diverse and reflect our students, so that they can see themselves in the books they read. However, it was equally as important to us that we engage with authors and writers themselves.

A recent Pegswood School student survey showed that only 16 per cent of KS2 children in our school could name five children's authors. We wanted to address this by inviting a wide range of writers into the Story Centre, giving our children the opportunity to interact with creators from different backgrounds and walks of life. So far, students have had the chance to engage with authors such as S.F. Said, Hannah Gold and Jennie Pearson, either through events or speaking over Zoom. When children meet the writers of stories they love, their interest and engagement go through the roof.

And we don't just limit these events to our students.

We encourage parents and carers to come along too, so they can see firsthand how much joy reading and storytelling can bring.

As part of our commitment to keep new books coming into the Story Centre, in 2022 we encouraged parents to gift teachers books on our reading list, rather than buy presents for staff. The idea went down so well, we did it again in 2023.

It's a hub for the community

We want the Story Centre to also be a meeting place for the whole community, and that is becoming a reality. For example, we hosted a workshop in partnership with a local business, where members of the community built autumn wreaths. Not only did this provide a chance to show off our Story Centre and act as a community hub, but with the workshop being ticketed (and proceeds donated to the school), it was also a way to raise money and continue bringing in new books and resources.

Looking to the future

With our Story Centre, I wanted to make sure that we

GETTING EVERYONE ON BOARD

- 1 Be loud and clear about your vision – enthusiasm is infectious.
- 2 Take some of the pressure off your colleagues by becoming an expert in children's books.
- 3 Make sure the library has something for everyone to enjoy, even if that isn't reading.
- 4 Find like-minded people in the community or online, so you can ask advice and share ideas.
- 5 Read! If you get lost in books that are being written and illustrated by incredible children's authors, that will filter down to the pupils.
- 6 Be creative about fundraising and funding. Competitions, raffles, sponsored reads, weekend workshops and grants have made it possible for us to book various author visits and events.

were creating a space that was enjoyable for all; that didn't feel like a chore, or create more work for teachers, but instead provided a wonderful space for our students and their families to visit.

We've achieved so much in our first term, I can't wait to see the long-term impact of this space and what we go on to do with it next, not just for our students, but for our whole community.



Rachael Sligo is an English lead teacher at Pegswood Primary

School. To find out more about literacy and initiatives in this area, please visit tinyurl.com/tp-NoT

AUTHOR IN YOUR CLASSROOM



Plazoom's interview series offers a compelling way to get your class excited about writing

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Joseph Coelho



Lauren Child



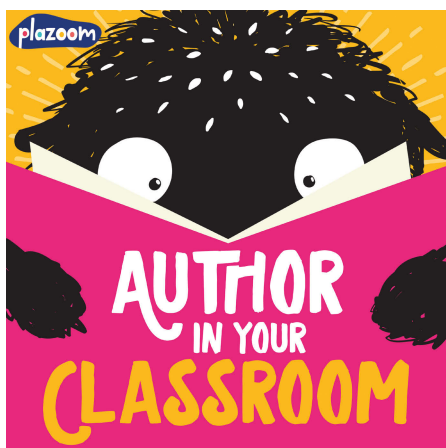
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-  Search for 'Author in your Classroom' podcast wherever you listen to podcasts.
-  Play it in your classroom – in one go, or in shorter chunks.
-  Pause the podcast and use our teaching notes to talk about the points being raised in the interview.



AVA GOES GREEN

Turn children's climate fear into climate fun with book 1 from the 'MASC to the eco-beat' series. This lower key stage 2 performing and creative arts resource, by Rona D. Linklater, highlights the effects of environmental pollution. Designed to galvanise children into action, the novel music and stories will encourage them to help protect our ecosystem and make a difference. It will also teach all children how to make music together and develop their creative writing and communication skills.

Why choose this resource?

- ✓ **A unique fusion** of fiction and nonfiction, delivered through an integration of novel music, art, stories and creative tasks, will captivate and allow children to relate to the characters or creatures, such as Kitti kittiwake and Toyesh, the little turtle, explaining about the dangers they face from climate change due to human pollution.
- ✓ **QR codes** in the book allow access, via my website, to free music accompaniment WAV files for the novel songs, and free instrumental parts for classroom percussion. Ideal for music- non-music specialists, peripatetic sessions or out-of-hours clubs. (*Scan QRclip*)



- ✓ **Stunning illustrations** by Stu McLellan, through agent Beehive Illustration, create a magical world to stimulate children's imagination. Differentiated creative activities provide a fun reinforcement of the learning through interaction and inclusive

participation for children of all abilities. This approach aims to encourage experiential learning, and develop communication, confidence and wellbeing.

- ✓ **Teaching information**—Throughout this book, children are encouraged to take responsibility for developing their own ideas and those of their peers. (Five+ books recommended for class use.) While there are opportunities, through basic and extension activities, for the teacher to adjust the 'Let's Create' tasks to suit the individual needs of their children, the focus of these tasks has been linked to the primary grading system assessment statements. See the Teacher – Parent – Leader Guides from my website for suggested objectives and outcomes.

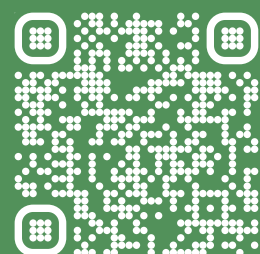
- ✓ "There is no more powerful message in the 21st century than climate change. There is no more powerful vehicle for communicating and delivering such a message to children than the performing and creative arts." So...

Inspire—Create—Enjoy!

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Books available from: Gardner Wholesalers, Troubador Publishing, MASC website, Presto Music and good bookshops.



Inside the ACTOR'S STUDIO

From pretending to eat chocolate cake to navigating Narnia in their imaginations, exploring literature as performers will fuel pupils' creativity and inspire deeper textual understanding

SAMANTHA MARSDEN

Sometimes, thinking about the study of literature can conjure images of quiet libraries, filled with students poring over books. However, reading and writing both involve the study of people, relationships, and what it means to be human – just as with acting. It's no coincidence, then, that there are many actor-writers; Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Matt Damon, Tina Fey, Spike Lee and William Shakespeare, to name just a few.

Bringing drama games and acting techniques into your classroom is a great way to make the study of literature more active, and inspire pupils to engage with literature in a practical, and character-driven way. Lorraine S Harrison, author of *Drama and Reading for Meaning Ages 4-11* (Routledge 2022), explains how this can work. She says, "Stepping into an imaginary context encourages children to view texts through the lens of different perspectives. It fosters an emotional engagement that can motivate and inspire children to peel back the layers of a text and dig a little deeper."

Acting techniques can build a bridge between text and imagination, maybe

even inspiring a love of reading for life. Here are some ideas to help you apply this approach in your classroom...

Acting activities for literature

Yes, Let's

Yes Let's is a simple, well-known drama game that can also be adapted to help students connect with a book or script.

To play, explain that everyone acts out what the

Once you've shared a few ideas, you can ask pupils to volunteer to share their ideas for things that everyone can do related to the text.

Yes, Let's can work with any text. For example, if you're studying *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, students are likely to love it if you say, "Let's all walk through the wardrobe into Narnia!" To extend this, you might like to read out a description of Narnia from the text

character finds themselves. If you're studying a book or script, you can ask pupils to choose one of the characters, and a particular point in the book, and to write out their given circumstances at that time.

For Stanislavski, six questions make up a character's given circumstances:

- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- For what reason?
- How?

You can reassure the children that for some of the answers, different people will have different interpretations, and that's great. See the panel on the right for a character sheet template that I like to use with pupils. You can ask them to choose a character from the text that's being studied, and then they answer the questionnaire in first person. Encourage them to draw the answers from the text when possible, and to fill in blanks with their imaginations.

Objectives

Actors and directors spend a lot of time thinking and talking about objectives (the character's wants). You can ask pupils to write down, discuss, or improvise

"Bringing drama games and acting techniques into your classroom is a great way to make literacy more active"

idea-caller (you, the teacher) calls out. For example, if you are studying *Matilda*, you might say, "Let's all be Bruce and eat a chocolate cake," and the class would reply, "Yes, let's!" Then everyone pretends to eat chocolate cake. Give it about a minute before you call out the next idea.

Next you might say, "Let's all copy sums from the board, Ms Trunchbull is watching!" and the class would reply, "Yes, let's!" before pretending to do this.

as students walk around, imagining the world you've called out.

Character studies

One way to study literature is to help students get inside the characters' minds and worlds. Konstantin Stanislavski is one of the most influential acting teachers in the world, and he coined the term 'given circumstances'. This refers to the environmental, historical, and situational conditions in which a

the character's objectives. This can be done on a per sentence, per scene, or whole-story basis. According to Stanislavski there are two types of objectives: the objective and the super objective. The objective is the want in the scene, or sentence. The super objective is the character's main want – their life ambition perhaps – or the overarching desire that drives the story.

Opinions may vary on what a character's objective

and super objective are, which is all part of the fun when investigating a text together. You can ask your class to share parts of the text that support their argument.

You can also split students into pairs and ask them to create an improvisation from objectives. For example, if you're studying *Alice in Wonderland*, you could ask them to create an improvisation with Alice

and the White Rabbit. Give the actor playing Alice the objective of trying to get home. The actor playing the White Rabbit is running late, and their objective is to arrive for a job for the Duchess. You can give the pairs five minutes to come up with an improvisation, and then ask them to share with the rest of the class, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Hot seating

To help students get into the minds of the characters you're studying, you can try hot seating. Place a chair (the hot seat) in front of the class. Ask for a volunteer to sit on the hot seat, and task them with thinking of a character from the book, or script, you are working on. Then ask them to try and think of all the character's given circumstances, including their age, name, job (if they have one), place that they live, their friends, family, likes, dislikes, fears and wants. Explain to the child that they can make up some of this information if it has not been given in the text. Now, in character, the improviser answers questions from the audience.

If they don't know the answer to a question, they can make up an answer, or say, "I don't know". The audience can ask any questions they like; see the character sheet template for ideas.

If you think some children might need a little more support before jumping into this, together as a class you can put together information about characters from the text you're working on. You can write each character on the board and under their name list their

CHARACTER SHEET

- ☺ Name:
- ☺ Age:
- ☺ Where do you live?
- ☺ What's your bedroom like if you have one?
- ☺ Have you had any life changing events? If yes, what happened and how did it change you?
- ☺ Who do you have significant relationships with?
- ☺ Who's your favourite person?
- ☺ Who's your least favourite person?
- ☺ If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?
- ☺ What do you most want from life?
- ☺ What scares you the most?
- ☺ What's your life philosophy in a nutshell?

given circumstances, wants, fears, habits, relationships, and so on.

Explain to pupils that it's okay for the same character to be played and hot seated more than once and that different interpretations are exciting!

I hope these ideas help make your literacy lessons a bit more lively... Action!



Sam is a former drama teacher at schools and youth theatres.

She is the author of 100 Acting Exercises for 8–18-Year-Olds (£16.99, Bloomsbury).

Out of ORDER

Want your Year 6 pupils to write great non-chronological reports?
Start early, says **Aidan Severs**

It might surprise you to find that the term ‘non-chronological report’ doesn’t feature anywhere in the national curriculum. Nonetheless, it’s become a staple of primary teaching; and even though some schools have moved away from a genre-based way of teaching writing, you’re still very likely to find yourself being required to teach children how to produce one.

What is a non-chronological report?

The purpose of a non-chronological report is to inform the reader, and it can be about anything that doesn’t require a time-ordered account. Subjects might include an introduction to a hobby, an overview of a place, or a piece about a child’s family.

Writing not suited to the non-chronological format would include things like a recount of a visit, a set of instructions, or a write-up of a science experiment.

Linking writing to previous learning

To remove the need to recall facts, pupils can also write non-chronological reports about fictional topics, for example, mythological beasts that they’ve created. However, in primary schools it’s often the case that you’ll link the piece of writing to some current (or

previous) learning in another curriculum area. The benefit of this is that children may be very knowledgeable about the subject if you’ve taught them well, and links to other subjects can give the writing some further purpose.

There are drawbacks, however. Children may get bogged down in trying to accurately represent their learning in other subjects to the point that demonstrating their writing ability takes a back seat. Make clear to

doesn’t specifically require pupils in KS1 to write non-chronological reports. However, it does require you to teach pupils in Year 2 to ‘develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by writing for different purposes’.

The purpose, as we have discovered already, of a non-chronological report is to inform the reader; so this should be the focus of any non-chronological report writing in Year 2. Beyond

material, using simple organisational devices (for example, headings and sub-headings).

The non-statutory guidance given in the national curriculum says: *Pupils should continue to have opportunities to write for a range of real purposes and audiences as part of their work across the curriculum. These purposes and audiences should underpin the decisions about the form the writing should take, such as a narrative, an explanation or a description.*

In the guidance for teachers of Years 5 and 6 it states:

Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing, selecting the appropriate form and using other similar writing as models for their own.

It also says that pupils should be taught to plan and draft their writing using further organisational and presentational devices to structure text and to guide the reader (for example by using headings, bullet points and underlining).

Progression through year groups

In **Year 2**, children can create simple non-chronological reports about topics they are familiar with, such as pets or favourite toys. Their focus can be on basic sections.

“Remember that the main purpose of a non-chronological report is to inform the reader of something”

them that they are not being assessed on their recall of the subject, but rather on the English knowledge and skills they can demonstrate. Try to ensure that’s where your feedback is focused.

That said, because non-chronological reports do not follow a sequential order, but instead focus on presenting facts and details in a structured manner, they can be a useful way to teach pupils how to organise their thoughts and understanding across the curriculum.

KS1 – laying the foundations

As previously mentioned, the national curriculum

this, any piece of writing in Year 2 should be a means of practising and showcasing other writing skills, as set out in the national curriculum under the headings of spelling, handwriting, composition, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation.

KS2 – refining the technique

In KS2, the national curriculum hints at what might be useful for pupils who are writing a non-chronological report. It says that pupils in Years 3 and 4 should be taught to draft and write by organising paragraphs around a theme, and in non-narrative

Provide scaffolds such as writing frames to help children organise information. You might also want to suggest a title and provide children with lots of time orally to rehearse what they want to write before they commit it to paper.

Children in **Year 3** can start exploring more diverse topics – potentially linked to prior learning – and learn to organise and structure their reports with clear headings and subheadings. Again,

you may want to scaffold this, perhaps using guided planning and structure strips. Provide practice tasks focusing on grouping information around a theme.

Where possible, give children a real-life purpose for their writing, for example, to teach their parents about what they have been learning.

Before moving on and adding other features to their non-chronological reports, students in **Year 4** can

spend time learning how to craft a more comprehensive introduction and conclusion. Provide lots of live modelling and examples of sentence structures for children to choose from, avoiding simple sentences such as, ‘This non-chronological report is about...’.

You can also show children how to ensure that they are incorporating technical vocabulary in their writing. The word lists in Appendix 1 of the English national curriculum are a good guide as to what is age-appropriate concerning spellings.

In **Year 5**, you can use assessment of prior knowledge to move children on. Begin to look at additional organisational features, such as bullet points, numbering, labels and captions. When using these, encourage pupils to make selections based on audience and purpose. Model how to make these decisions so that the information is presented as clearly as possible.

By **Year 6**, the ideal is for children to be writing non-chronological reports with a high degree of independence, demonstrating all their prior learning accurately. Your school’s individual English curriculum will likely have new grammar and punctuation content that children need to practise, too: colons, semi-colons, conjunctions and so on all have their place in non-chronological reports.

Key features

By the time they reach **Year 6**, pupils should be including all of the following in their non-chronological reports:

- **Title** – this should be clear, engaging, and reflect the subject of the report.
- **Introduction** – a brief overview of the topic, without getting into the details that will feature in the rest of the report.
- **Paragraphs** – the content should be organised based on the different aspects of the subject being presented.
- **Subheadings** – these should be used to signal paragraphs or sections comprising more than one paragraph. This makes it easy for the reader to navigate through different aspects of the subject.
- **Facts and information** – the report should focus on the presentation of factual information and details, not opinions.
- **Illustrations and visuals** – non-chronological reports, such as the ones you see in children’s non-fiction books, usually include images, diagrams, and other visuals related to the content. The purpose of these is to aid the reader in understanding the text.
- **Presentational features** – bullet points, numbering, labels and captions should be used to present information with clarity, and organise information clearly.



Aidan Severs is an education consultant with over 15 years of teaching experience.

 @AidanSevers

 aidansevers.com



ENGLISH | MATHS | WELLBEING 



BookTrust – Letterbox Club

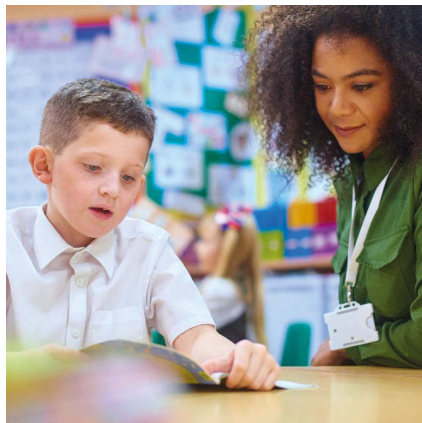
Delightful packages of books, games and stationery for vulnerable children



AT A GLANCE

- Exciting packages for children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage
- Six parcels to be used flexibly to suit your school and children
- Quality fun and educational activities
- Perfect for schools and local authorities to support children with disrupted education

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES



There's something magical about getting a pleasant surprise. Something exciting. Something inspiring. And something just for you. Even those of us who were lucky enough to have been brought up in a secure home might just remember that feeling. Perhaps it heralded a birthday or some other special occasion.

The sad fact is that there are many children who rarely experience that sense of being made to feel special. That is why the Letterbox Club, from the BookTrust, is such a gift.

The Letterbox Club is a delightful way of delivering joy to children who might otherwise miss out on such simple pleasures. Very often, these are children who have never experienced the wonder of receiving something just for them. These can include the looked-after, the previously looked-after and those on the edge of the care system as well as children experiencing vulnerabilities or disadvantage.

Children in care often have few possessions of their own, things that actually belong to them exclusively, so the Letterbox Club parcels enable children to have some quality resources that are theirs to keep; helping them to feel valued.

I have known children who, on the face of it, are well looked after, yet are still suffering the effects of early-life trauma, neglect or abandonment. This can have a marked effect on their confidence, their behaviour and their capacity to engage with education. That's why I felt a strong surge of admiration for this excellent initiative.

Right, having got that out of my system, let's look at what the Letterbox Club actually provides. There are six parcels in total, available for each age group from three to 13. These can be used flexibly

to suit a school setting or group of children – either to be gifted to individual children each month or can be used as resources for use in school for small groups of children. That's exciting enough. But when I opened the sample I was sent, I was definitely impressed.

This was no tacky collection of stocking-fillers but a thoughtfully curated package of quality products. For a start, there are the books. My selection included a sweet, illustrated tale of fun and friendship and an exciting wildlife book packed with activities, information and stickers – who doesn't love stickers?

And remember, these can be used for children to keep, complete with labels to personalise them. For children who might never have had a book of their own, what a joy that would be!

There was a currency-based maths game, complete with a generous supply of replica coins and notes. There was also a pencil case equipped with pen, pencil, rubber, pencil sharpener and ruler (everyone loves stationery!) plus a lined notebook in which to jot down thoughts, stories, whatever.

And this does more than create a brief surge of wellbeing. According to testimonials from teachers and carers, it has helped to spark a renewed interest in learning and, in some cases, led to marked academic progress.

You can pontificate all you want about the 'failure of the system', the plight of these children and how life has dealt them a bad hand.

Then again, you can celebrate how, in a small way, Letterbox has delivered a way of bringing some tangible brightness to these tarnished childhoods for a remarkably small outlay.

In my opinion, it's worth every penny.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✓ Quality products
- ✓ Thoughtful mix of items and activities
- ✓ Educational without being oppressively so
- ✓ Tangibly joyful
- ✓ A genuine boon to children who really need it

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LITERACY



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AT A GLANCE

- Quality-first grammar lessons furnished with a raft of resources
- Follows a simple five-step structure
- Three levels of differentiation included
- Terminology definitions and modelled examples
- Superb teaching guide

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



Recent research suggests that what helps children to develop their writing skills at different points in development, is focusing on teaching approaches such as sentence-combining, strategy instruction and emphasising the processes of writing. For this you need innovative, interactive and expert literacy resources such as those by Plazoom. For grappling with grammar then look no further than their new whole-school programme, Real Grammar.

This multimodal and visually appealing set of resources follows a new approach to teaching grammar to ensure deep learning through meaning, creativity and choice. Real Grammar adopts a very structured approach and is taught as part of the literacy sequence ‘teach, practise, revisit, apply, revise’, so that learning can be spaced over time. The units have been organised to cover all the grammar and punctuation objectives and each has a specially written model text showing the objective in context.

The ‘teach’ section provides comprehensive teaching sequences so that pupils are able to get to grips with every concept and can apply their learning in context. There are impressive teaching scripts to follow, with key questions and

prompts included for high-quality learning. The ‘practise’ examples are pitched at three different levels and so they should capture the needs of most pupils, and can be used to consolidate learning and identify any gaps or misconceptions. These sections can be adhered to as part of a classroom literacy routine, but they can also be used flexibly rather than as a fixed route through grammar terrain.

A range of games and activities are included so that areas can be revisited and embedded. ‘Revise’ sections include differentiated exercises to help prepare pupils for end-of-year assessments. Embedded within these sections is an outstanding collection of teaching essentials, including detailed notes, editable PowerPoint lessons, model texts, practice worksheets, games, writing prompts, and more, all of which have suggestions for challenge and support, with opportunities to investigate and develop ideas.

The high-quality resources are child-friendly without being childish, age-appropriate, and have plenty of pedagogical punch. These are genuinely outstanding materials that are expertly created for making grammar lessons easy.

Teach Reading & Writing

VERDICT

- ✓ A sure-fire way of helping pupils to generate sentences and get in the groove with grammar
- ✓ Supports children apply their skills across the curriculum
- ✓ Grammar for fun, challenge, interest and creativity
- ✓ Helps to improve listening and comprehension skills
- ✓ Everything you need to introduce, explore and identify each objective in context

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to create cohesion in your grammar provision using effective resources underpinned by a robust teaching sequence so that children can achieve deep grammatical learning.

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“Animals have a unique magic all of their own”

Nicola Baker hopes that her series of books about life on a farm will spark a passion for the countryside in its young readers...

Growing up in rural communities I always had a love of the countryside, animals and nature. The books I read as a child often had animals at their heart – *The Owl Who was Afraid of the Dark*, *Charlotte’s Web*, *The Battle for Badger’s Wood*.

Farming, however, was something I experienced later in life, in my teenage years. It’s something I instantly connected with, and I feel fortunate that my children have been able to grow up helping out on the farm and spending lots of time with our livestock and pets.

Being around animals teaches children so much that they can take with them into adulthood. It builds foundations of resilience, responsibility, kindness and compassion, as well as perseverance and problem-solving. We work together as a family a lot on the farm, which builds a strong work ethic and a sense of teamwork – both fantastic life skills.

I believe that children are never too young to start developing these skills, and books about animals and the countryside help to ignite this sort of passion from an early age. It’s so important to get a connection with farming too. We all eat food, so being familiar with where it comes from and what goes into producing it is a natural thing. If a spark of interest can be created at an early age, it can only be a good thing going forward. It’s a joy to see the children’s faces light up on school visits when they see the photos of animals on our family farm and watch the video of an egg hatching; animals have a unique magic all of their own.



“I’m a firm believer that you don’t know what you’re going to love until you try it”

I’ve used my experiences of farming, animals and the countryside to create a realistic world in the Whistledown Farm Adventures.

Each of the four books in the series is set in a different season, to encompass the nature and farming calendars. The first book, *Finding Hope*, takes place during spring, which is a busy time in the farming calendar. It’s particularly hectic on a sheep farm during the spring lambing period, and it’s always one of my favourite times of the year.

I don’t think I’ll ever get tired of seeing a lamb being born: watching it stand within minutes and then happily shake its tail as it takes its first drink. This is the sort of thing I’ve included

in the books, so that children can get a flavour of what it’s like on a farm. Hopefully they’ll pick up some interesting facts about things like hatching eggs and lambing.

Although all four books in the series are fictional, it was important to me that the stories were peppered with real-life elements taken from farming, the natural world and the countryside.

Sometimes that means writing about the not-so-nice things, as that’s the reality.

Farming is a passion. Most farmers will tell you it’s in their blood: it’s a vocation and a lifestyle rather than a job. They are out in all weathers, every single day. Ava’s journey in *Finding Hope* starts with her like a fish out of water, and reluctant to get stuck in to farm life.

I’m a firm believer that you don’t know what you’re going to love until you try it, and this is what happens to Ava. She realises that she loves the farm and all the animals on it, and becomes determined to save one lamb in particular.

Even when everyone around her won’t listen to her worries about some strange goings on at the farm, she trusts her instincts to get to the truth.

My hope is that if readers from non-rural backgrounds get to experience the world of farming and the countryside through my books then they, just like Ava, might discover something they love.



Nicola Baker’s new book, Finding Hope: A Whistledown Farm Adventure, is out now (Hardback, Simon & Schuster Children’s Books).



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