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BEAUTIFUL”*

Why pupil creativity is key

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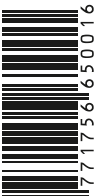
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Hello!



How's the autumn term going for you so far? Hopefully you've had magical learning moments aplenty. If school is leaving you anxious and sleep-deprived though, John Dabell (p17) is worried you might be trying to remedy things in the wrong way.

We have some lovely literacy features this issue. On page 63, Jo Cummins has put together a KS1 book topic for Lanisha

Butterfield's gorgeous *Flower Block*, which is a heartfelt exploration of nature and community. On page 54, Topsy Page explains how you can boost oracy across your class by harnessing the power of simple hand signals. Meanwhile, Pie Corbett offers expert advice on how to create a reading spine for your school (p57). Our latest WAGOLL (p60) is taken from James Fox's *The Boy in the Suit*, which follows ten-year-old Solo Walker and his mum as they struggle through the cost-of-living crisis.

On which note, our leadership section is all about financial stability, with guidance on finding new funds, keeping up with procurement procedure and taking difficult decisions (p39).


We also have an interesting case study from Darren Eales, Tes' Primary Curriculum Leader of the Year, who breaks down how he went about transforming his school's approach to science (p36).

This issue's lesson plans have a seasonal theme. On page 76, Sabina Khanam takes KS1 children on a jaunt into the woods, and Matthew Lane explores Advent with KS2 (p74).

And in our maths section, Jacob Merrill ponders creativity and offers ideas to get children making mathematical works of art (p44). Nicola Adams wants you to bring more games into your lessons (p52) and Ian Connors (p49) explores the history and use of manipulatives.

As ever, do drop me an email if you have a resource or idea you'd like to share with Teach Primary readers.

Lydia

Lydia Grove, editor
 @TeachPrimaryLG

Don't miss our next issue, available from 8th November

POWERED BY...



SAM MARSDEN shares her six-week plan for putting on a performance

"It can be liberating for pupils to walk and talk as another character"

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PIE CORBETT explains how to create a reading spine

"Books that are so deeply imagined they stay with the reader forever"

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PARI THOMSON describes her tried-and-tested world-building exercises

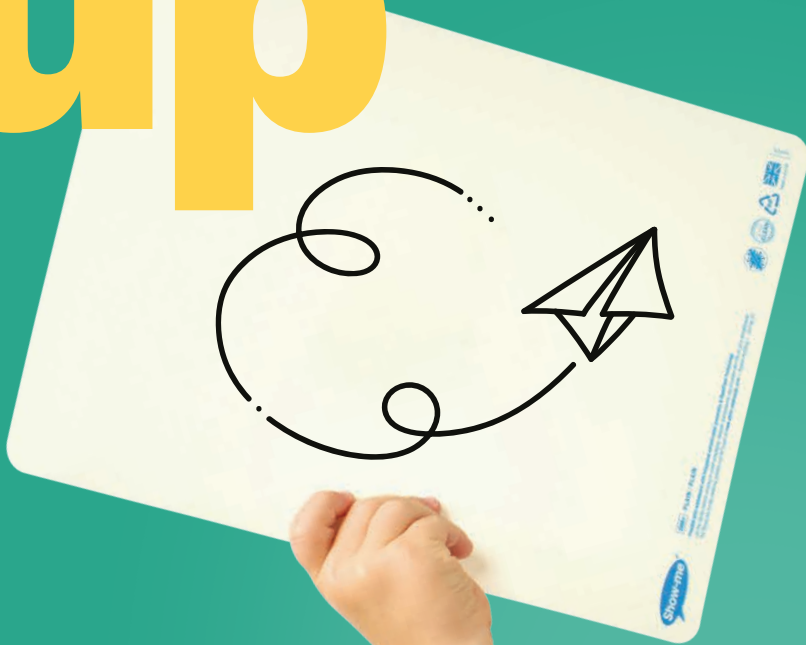
"I am always astonished by the sheer, wild creativity of what children come up with"

P71



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Playing games in maths lessons means all pupils come out on top – even when they lose

We're all ears!

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

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We want to hear from you!

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



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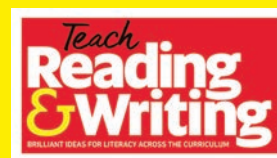
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Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research

Read your way

The latest selections for World Book Day 2025 are here! The range of 15 books, chosen with the help of children across the nation, features stories and characters from family favourites such as Bluey and Paddington Bear, along with titles from beloved authors like Julia Donaldson, Joseph Coelho and Benjamin Dean.

World Book Day 2025 falls on 6 March, and will offer the 15 books at £1/€1.50, or free in exchange for a £1 book token. Supported by long-term sponsor, National Book Tokens, and working alongside publishers and booksellers, World Book Day will build on its work improving access to books and encouraging everyone to give children the choice – and a chance – to enjoy reading.

Read more and find the full list of £1/€1.50 books at tinyurl.com/tp-WBD25



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



FOOTY PHONICS

Having supported over 1 million pupils during the 2023/24 season, Premier League Primary Stars is back, with brand-new Footy Phonics for KS1. Check it out at tinyurl.com/tp-FP



DOGS IN SCHOOLS

A new online course from Animal Focused arms teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement pet therapy in classrooms. Read more at tinyurl.com/tp-Dogs



CYBERSECURITY TOOLKIT

Edtech charity LGfL – The National Grid for Learning – has developed the free Elevate cybersecurity toolkit to help schools safeguard their IT systems and data. Find it at tinyurl.com/tp-Elevate

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Q & A



Lizzie Daly
Scientist, filmmaker and writer

1. What was primary school like for you?

I have fond memories of primary school. It's where my sense of adventure really bloomed, and my desire to explore the world was ignited. Primary school is such an important formative experience for children, and I'll never forget mine.

2. What was the most surprising thing you learned while writing your book?

I really enjoyed reading about the many communities around the world that were moved by individual animals and their fascinating journeys. It really showcases the power of storytelling and how tagging technology and citizen science projects can bring studies and species conservation to life. For me, the most surprising thing was how remarkable some of these journeys really were. We like to think we know a lot about charismatic species like wild dogs, wolves and jaguars, but time and time again wildlife shows us how resilient and adaptable it really is.

3. What is your favourite extreme environment to explore?

When I first went to the Arctic I fell in love with it. You feel like a true explorer when standing on tundra in search of ultimate survivors like penguins, polar bears and musk ox. That's why writing about Arctic and Antarctic species was a must. Not only are they facing the biggest challenges in the climate crisis, but they are all species that I've come face to face with; it was important to me to have that personal connection to every animal.

Life in the Wild by Lizzie Daly, illus. Chiara Fedele (£14.99, DK) is available now.



'Beautiful book' wins prize

The 2024 Klaus Flugge Prize, awarded to the 'most exciting and promising newcomer to children's book illustration' has gone to Kate Winter for her debut title.

The Fossil Hunter, following

the life of 19th century palaeontologist Mary Anning, utilises atmospheric watercolour paintings to tell Mary's personal story and detail her discoveries and their scientific impact. Kate said: "Mary was a creative thinker. She dared to dream up something no one had ever thought of before. That's what I want to do with my work."

Chair of judges, Julia Eccleshare, said: "Mary Anning's story has been told before, but through the illustrations and Kate's distinctive approach, *The Fossil Hunter* creates a unique sense of her character and work."

Read more at tinyurl.com/tp-FossilHunter

Pupil hunger increasing

A survey of more than 10,000 teachers across England has found that the number bringing in food for pupils has once again increased. The survey, carried out by TeacherTapp on behalf of food distribution charity FareShare, found that 28 per cent of teachers polled had provided food for their class last term, up from 26 per cent in summer term 2023. FareShare is urging the government to adopt a food redistribution policy as part of its Where's the Food campaign. FareShare chief executive George Wright said: "Teachers across the country still find themselves stepping in to feed hungry children, highlighting a growing crisis. Meanwhile, millions of tons of perfectly edible food continue to go to waste every year." Read more at tinyurl.com/tp-PupilHunger



1 in 10 children never choose to read at home without parental input

Look ahead | Book ahead

INTO FILM FESTIVAL

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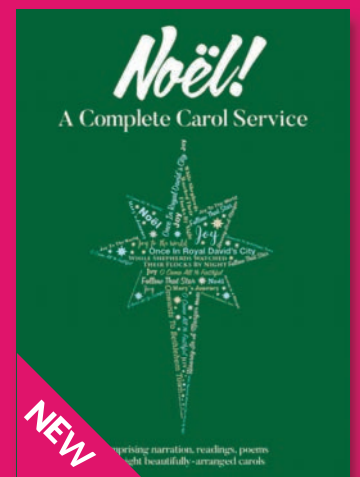
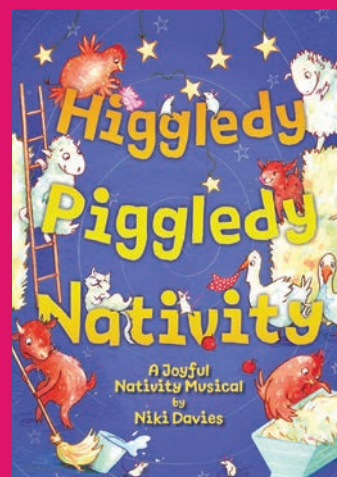
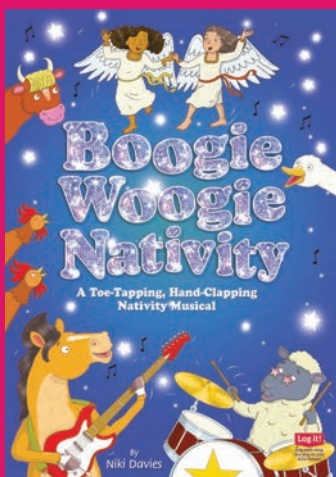
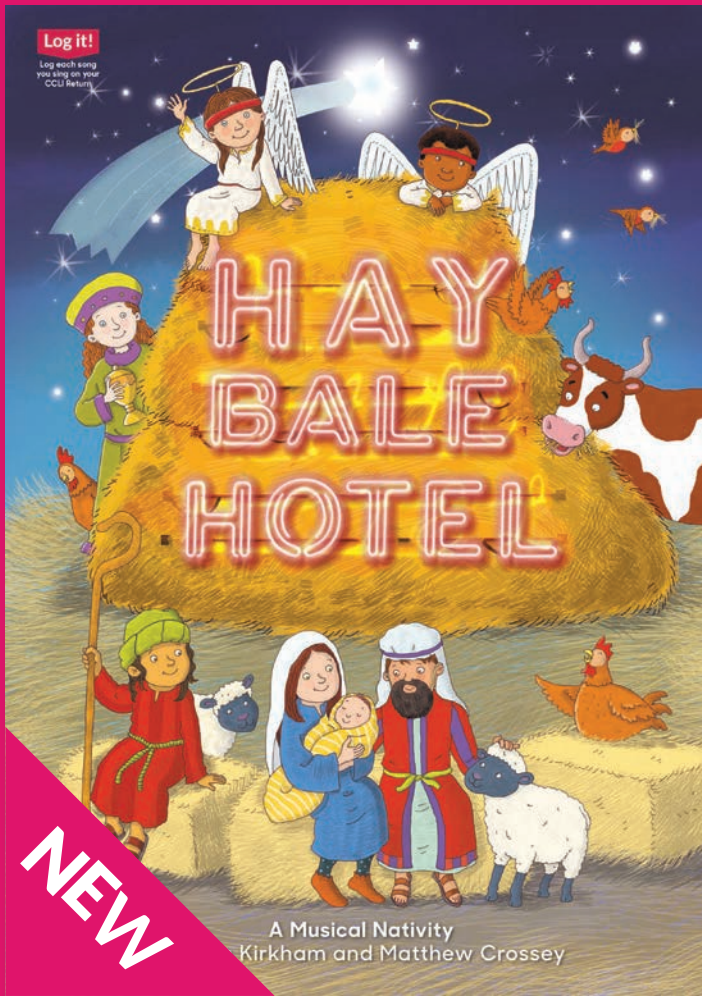


CHOOSE RESPECT

This year's Anti-Bullying Week takes place from 11-15 November. The theme is Choose Respect. Download your free resources and themed assemblies at tinyurl.com/tp-ChooseRespect



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6 ways to tackle bullying

Embrace difference and boost empathy to create an inclusive school environment

1 | TALK ABOUT POLICIES

Consult with pupils, staff, parents/carers and governors to identify the key challenges within your community and better understand how school policies and processes can be improved. This can also help establish a shared vision for tackling and preventing prejudice-based bullying across the whole school community. Once policies and processes have been reviewed, it's vital they are effectively disseminated so that every member of the school community knows what their role is in implementing the school's anti-bullying strategies. Bullying shouldn't be viewed in isolation, and efforts to tackle and prevent it need to be rooted in your school values. Set time aside to work with young people on ensuring they understand the school policies and their role in tackling prejudice.

2 | PRIORITISE PREVENTION

Research suggests that preventative measures, such as bystander training and programmes focused on empathy building, can have a positive impact in schools. A recent research and evaluation report from Diversity Role Models and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) found that storytelling workshops, featuring personal stories from volunteer role models that focused on difference, had hugely positive outcomes for young people ([tinyurl.com/tp-NCVO](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-NCVO)).

3 | MAKE DIFFERENCE A PART OF THE EVERYDAY

The NCVO report revealed that schools where pupils were educated extensively about diversity saw significantly lower instances of bullying related to those differences. For example, schools in which young people said they regularly learned about LGBTQ+ identities tended to report lower rates of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. One of the ways teachers can introduce diverse identities and a positive representation of difference into the classroom is through 'usualising'.

When you usualise, you familiarise pupils with the presence of diverse identities in society and take away the threat of difference which can create fear and motivate bullying.



JAC BASTIAN
is chief education officer at Diversity Role Models.

4 | EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF PREJUDICE

The natural successor to usualising is 'actualising'. This involves exploring social issues relating to identity, difference and discrimination in the classroom in detail. Actualising enables us to explore the impact that prejudice can have on individuals and on society; it allows us to encourage critical thinking and engage with key social questions relating to equality. When discussing social issues such as prejudice and discrimination, you can use personal stories from popular culture or literature, create characters to explore issues or find real-life case studies to build empathy and understanding.

5 | BRING YOUR SCHOOL VALUES TO LIFE

School values can be abstract, so efforts should be made to ensure those values, as well as policies, are understood – and embodied within the behaviour and attitudes of the whole community. Diversity Role Models ([diversityrolemodels.org](https://www.diversityrolemodels.org)) has a range of resources available to support schools with celebrating different identities and fostering inclusion and respect, including through its multimedia Role Model Stories videos and Upstander Animation Series for primary pupils. Exploring diversity is a wonderful opportunity for schools to engage and work with the local community, parents/carers and governors. It also offers an opportunity for school leaders to build a positive environment where the diversity of the school community is visibly celebrated.

6 | PROVIDE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Bullying should be addressed with a 'whole-school approach'. As such, all colleagues, including lunchtime supervisors and reception staff, should be included in any training, which should be tailored and relevant to their roles. Everyone – staff, pupils, even governors – has a part to play in preventing and tackling bullying in schools. Building the confidence and skills to take action against bullying is the key to success; currently many people in school lack the confidence to do so.



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The HAF is under threat and needs our help

School holidays could become much more challenging for low-income families from next year

 premier-education.com

For many families, school holidays – particularly the long summer break – can prove to be incredibly tough. Even without additional childcare costs, parents and carers may struggle to afford the nutritious food and enriching activities that their children need.

One source of reliable – and most importantly, free – childcare, which includes a variety of activities as well as food, is the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme (tinyurl.com/tp-GovHAF). But this invaluable scheme faces closure...

What is the HAF?

The HAF programme was set up by the DfE in 2018. It enables children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals to attend holiday camps for free during the Christmas and Easter breaks and for part of the summer holidays. This eases the financial burden holidays can bring to families, and ensures children have nutritious meals as well as fun and friendship. It also allows parents

to work, by offering a safe, secure and enriching childcare provision.

Why is it important?

Schools are so often lifelines for children from low-income families. They are places of safety, security, routine and stimulation, not to mention the all-important food provision. School holidays can put vulnerable children at risk if low-income families aren't given the support they need in terms of both childcare and food.

Since the launch of the HAF, hundreds of thousands of children from low-income homes have benefited from positive, fun and varied experiences during school holidays.

What the future holds

The scheme was only planned to be funded for five years, meaning that at the end of the financial year (March 2025), it will cease to operate.

But the impact of the HAF cannot be overstated. This is particularly true for food-insecure households, where the absence of free school meals can lead to

'holiday hunger', exacerbate existing inequalities, and negatively impact children's overall physical health and wellbeing.

Children who participate in the HAF programme return to school healthier, happier, and more prepared to learn. They benefit from the social interaction and physical activity provided by the camps, and their families receive crucial support in the form of activity, childcare and nutritious meals.

Meanwhile, the new government is yet to provide any clarity on how – or whether – the scheme will be replaced.

What you can do

You're not responsible for your pupils during school holidays, of course. But you undoubtedly want to support families all year round and limit any potential 'learning loss' that school holidays can result in.

There are some key things you can do to help struggling families:

- Inform parents about the benefits of the HAF programme.
- Encourage those families who would benefit the most from HAF to enrol, guiding them where necessary. (Your local authority can advise you.)
- Help put pressure on the new government, asking them to provide clarity on the scheme's renewal or replacement as a matter of urgency. Contact your local MP and ask for a response.
- As soon as the government provides an update on the future of the programme, help to promote it among families at your school so they are clear on the opportunities available.
- Make sure vulnerable families are aware of other support services, such as Turn2us (turn2us.org.uk), The Trussell Trust (trusselltrust.org), Place2Be (place2be.org.uk) and Healthy Start (healthystart.nhs.uk).

Ultimately, the timing of this programme coming to an end couldn't be worse. Sky-high food and energy costs, as well as eye-watering interest rates, mean families – even those with reasonable salaries – are having to make difficult choices.

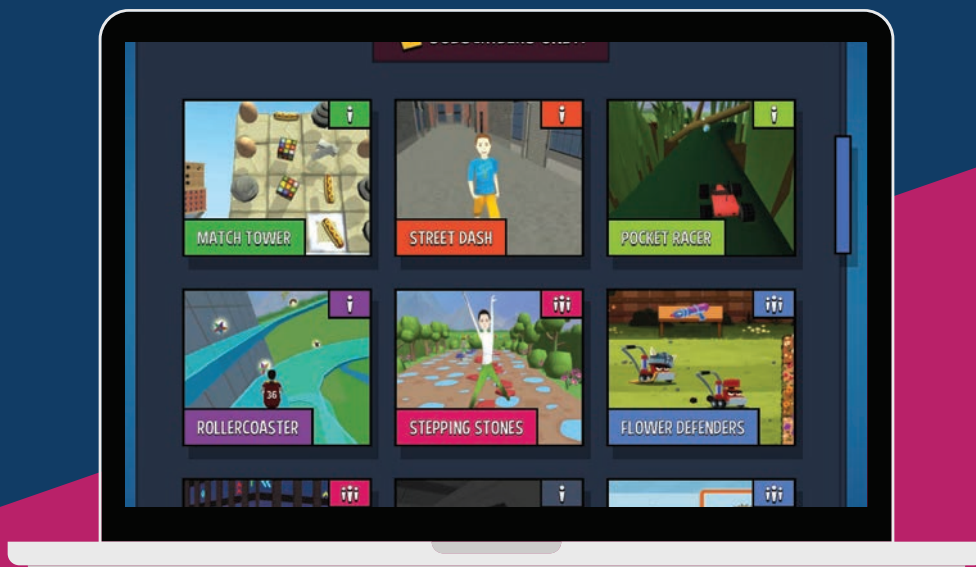
Without some urgent clarification on the future of the HAF, schools have no way of knowing if their pupils are potentially going to suffer during school holidays. **TP**

Laurence York is head of growth at Premier Education.





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A step up from STAR CHARTS

Anne Lancaster demonstrates how to use gamification sympathetically

Gamification—the use of game elements and principles in non-game contexts—sometimes gets a bad reputation for only appealing to loud, competitive children, and potentially shifting focus from learning to winning. However, when applied thoughtfully, gamification can encourage every child to do their best, foster a sense of belonging, and help them realise their potential.

Inclusivity

Allowing children to engage in purely playful activities can be incredibly empowering, even without a specific outcome. For example, exploring gravity by building tall towers with plastic bricks until they topple over encourages experimentation and resilience. This allows children to try things without fear of the result of ‘getting it right’. Collecting and earning badges is another powerful motivator for many pupils and may allow for many different kinds of personalities to try to achieve something outside of learning success. Create a variety of badges that recognise positive behaviours like kindness, tidiness, completing homework, going the extra mile, or trying something new.

Make it social

Connecting pupils with each other makes activities more exciting and rewarding. Implementing a House system, long used in schools,



“Allowing children to engage in purely playful activities can be incredibly empowering”

can help build a sense of identity beyond just the class to the wider school community. It allows pupils of different ages to interact, support each other, and work together. Being part of something with an identity can help different children do things for the benefit of the larger group.

Pairing pupils for competitions can create fairer and more engaging experiences too. For example, matching children of similar abilities for a head-to-head spelling test helps maintain a sense of ‘urgent optimism’, where both competitors feel that they have an equal chance of winning.

An alternative technique to a classic team-based class competition is to introduce a collective goal, such as the whole class reading a combined total of 1,000 books in a term. This can

also unify the whole group, allowing every child to contribute, regardless of their individual achievement level. It’s a great way of including pupils who have very different educational abilities. You may also find children helping and encouraging each other to read more.

Unexpected rewards

While some children prefer to know the exact outcome of their efforts, adding an element of surprise can heighten excitement. For instance, using a spinning wheel of names, or a lucky dip, to determine who gets to do a special activity can motivate participation. Limiting the availability and frequency of rewards can also increase their value. A classic example is selecting one child each week to take home a prized soft toy—a

privilege that becomes more coveted because it’s rare. This exclusivity encourages children to adhere to classroom rules and participate fully in order to qualify for selection to care for the toy.

Future-proofing

Gamification, when used thoughtfully, can transform classroom dynamics, motivating children of all abilities and personalities. By incorporating inclusive, social and exciting game elements, teachers can create an environment where every child feels valued and engaged. When implementing gamification, it’s crucial the children know what the rules are, that they’re fair and that they must be adhered to for the game to work. If children perceive that biases or cheaters have been allowed to interfere with the rules, they won’t trust or participate in the activity and may be cynical about the next proposed game. Make sure games reward the different behaviours that you’re seeking to see in your classroom, and that all children will have a chance to succeeding – especially those who don’t get the highest scores in their assessments. **TP**



Anne Lancaster is kids product manager at Sumdog – a games-based maths

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

A letter to...

Early risers

Joining the 5am Club might seem like a good idea at the time – but it's no way to deal with insomnia, warns **John Dabell**



Teach. Repeat.'

Sleep is a precious resource. Teaching gets into your system, sabotages your circadian rhythm, and ensures you fret about every mortal thing to do with school.

You've tried snorting lavender, and piped the crackling fire and rain sound apps through your headphones; you've munched on magnesium, zoned out on zinc and even done DIY acupuncture with biofeedback. And yet, you still find yourself a bundle of nerves, agonising over Jaffar's IEP and wondering whether a horseshoe seating plan would be better for teaching magnets. There's no point going 'along the corridor and up the stairs to Bedfordshire', when all you can think about is your coordinates lesson the next day. Once again, you're wide awake before cockcrow.

So, what do you do? Some restless teachers jump on their preferred social media platform and join fellow sleep-starved souls at the '5am Club'. The first to post lets everyone know the virtual kettle is on and toast is on the way. This dawn chorus of early risers busily share their ambitions for the day, their worries, their mission statements and even their lesson plans.

Some log in even earlier than 5am, as a badge of honour, and let the world know that they are in the fast lane of slaying the day and have already meditated, done a downward dog, been for a 5K run and completed their

Eat. Sleep. Teach. Repeat. For some teachers, that should read 'Eat. Lay Awake All Night Worrying.

gratitude journal. Most are just happy to share what a crap night's sleep they've had and how much they are dreading teaching 'time' to their Year 3 class straight after playground duty.

As more and more members join the chat, comments get bashed back and forth over the net.

Please stop. Can there be anything more damaging to teacher mental health and wellbeing than this competitive virtual staffroom that celebrates sleeplessness, anxiety and overachievement? The early bird doesn't always catch the worm.

“Did you hear about the primary that trialled a twilight sleep clinic?”

Rise-and-shiners are full of stress hormones, and more likely to catch colds.

Last year's Teacher Wellbeing Index from Education Support (tinyurl.com/tp-WellbeingIndex) reported many symptoms of poor mental health amongst education staff. The most common was difficulty sleeping, with senior leaders experiencing the highest levels of insomnia.

The 5am club might be a cathartic outlet for some, but it's further contributing to the burn-out, stress, exhaustion and insomnia of many. It's not healthy.

There will be those who say you can 'own the day' and elevate your life by joining the 5am club, but these aren't normally teachers at the coalface. Far from being the power hour, the 5am club is a toxic time zone and there's no gold star for being a member.



There are some jammy teachers who do manage to sleep deeper than the Mariana trench and get a full eight hours. But these are generally the colleagues that have bagged an early morning PPA slot, are working two days a week or are nearing retirement. What can *you* do though?

You know that ditching coffee will help break the insomnia cycle, and so will nixing the screens before News at Ten. But you aren't prepared to go that far.

Well, did you hear about the primary that trialled a six-week after-school twilight sleep clinic for their bleary-eyed staff? Apparently it worked wonders.

Each Monday, everyone rocked up with sleeping bags in the assembly hall for their 'staff meeting by osmosis'. They were encouraged to nod off and allow the meeting to wash over them. SLT administered biofeedback and whispered the 'Soft kitty, warm kitty' lullaby, whilst a slide deck with embedded ASMR videos on 'comparative judgement to assess oracy' was projected onto the ceiling.

This culminated in an end-of-term school sleepover and pillow fight, fuelled by passionflower tea, CBD and whale song. Insomnia is now down by 28 per cent and 'early rising' by 41 per cent. Staff reported they had 'never felt more alive'.

Perhaps the 'Bring Your Own Sleeping Bag to the Next Staff Meeting Club' could make happy Slumberjacks and Jills of us all?

Yours, John

John Dabell is a former teacher, a hoister of happiness, mental health philanthropist, fresh-air fiend, threshold adventurer and disability activist.



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[THE OPPORTUNITY]

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Simply register your interest or schedule a call with our Global Schools Director, Emma Ringe (emma.ringe@whizzeducation.com) to discuss this opportunity – we'll be very happy to answer any questions you may have.

UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Tackling the absence problem – are politicians and schools going about it all wrong?

Falling attendance hits the headlines again

The biggest buzzword over the last few months has been school attendance. The Conservatives wanted to improve it, Labour has announced that it is still at the forefront of their thinking, Ofsted has a sharp focus on it, and schools everywhere recognise the value of good attendance.

The story of declining attendance levels begins with COVID and, to some extent, I can understand the argument that might be going on inside parents' heads. Maybe it's a conscious thought, or maybe it's completely subconscious, but I reckon it's definitely there: *'If they can miss months and months of school for lockdowns, what does one day matter?'*

I totally understand this sentiment. I understood the fury, too, when teachers went on strike: *'Why, if it's so important to be in school every day, can you go on strike and shut it completely?'*

And I absolutely understand the lure of cheaper holidays. The markup on prices is ridiculous. My wife fancied a trip to Denmark and looked up flights for the May half-term next year. The cost was £500 per ticket. Two weeks earlier? £80. That's hard to justify, and for many families, choosing to travel during termtime might suddenly make holidays and trips of a lifetime affordable. Returning to post-COVID attitudes, what does a week or two matter?

That brings us to the solutions. Schools everywhere have tried various approaches. Certificates and rewards are popular but if a child falls ill, they don't receive their award for 100 per cent attendance. This seems a little unfair. Or is everyone judged on a case-by-case basis?

Consequences and fines for poor attendance and holidays taken are also enforced. However, with such a difference in holiday costs, the fine often works out considerably cheaper. So where is the deterrent for parents? The debate between carrot and stick usually arises, but in practice, neither seems effective.

So how can we really effect change? I believe the only way is through a cultural shift. Education and school need to be valued more.

The government's new, tougher fines and punishments for parents may make a difference. The clearer specification of missed days on a rolling time scale and the associated consequences might act as a deterrent. However, this approach might not achieve what's truly needed—a cultural shift in how attendance is perceived. The link between attendance and outcomes is clear, and it frustrates schools when they know what pupils could achieve, if only they were present more often.

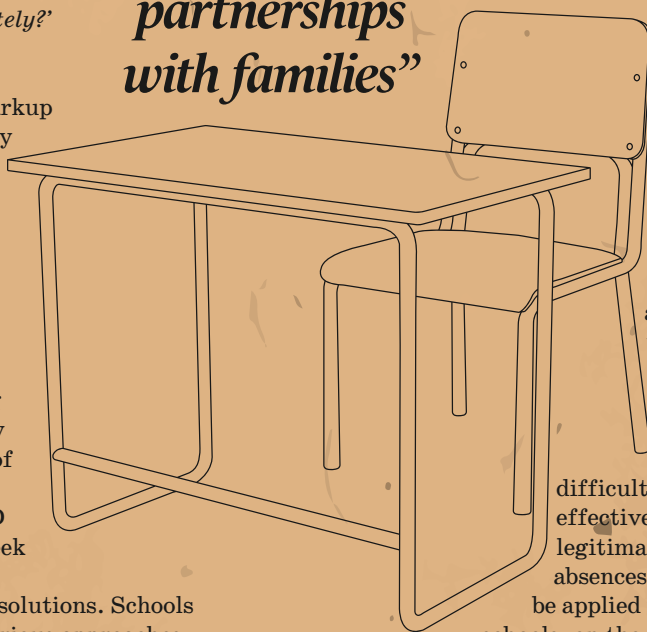
Persistent absence is where the real problems lie, and when speaking with parents about their children's attendance, I often ask what they do for a living, and whether such levels of attendance would be tolerated in their workplace. They always respond with a resounding 'no'.

The real work lies not in punishment, but in building partnerships with families—developing relationships, engaging with them, demonstrating the importance of school, and understanding why attendance may not be valued. All of these things require time and resources, which schools increasingly lack, meaning this will be a difficult issue to address effectively. There are often legitimate reasons for prolonged absences, so blanket rules cannot be applied universally. How can schools, on the one hand, strive to build

these key relationships while, on the other, undermine them by issuing fines and prosecutions? It's a challenging balance to strike.

Efforts around attendance need to focus on the *why*. But that is sometimes the most difficult question to answer, and the one that takes most time to explore. No school wants children to be absent, we all want them there. But perhaps fines are too blunt a tool, where what's really needed is humanity and support. **TP**

“The real work lies not in punishment, but in building partnerships with families”



The author is a headteacher in England.

X @secretHT1

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me



Bilingualism in the CLASSROOM

Ed Finch and Dr Eowyn Crisfield discuss the importance of identity when supporting EAL pupils

In a recent episode of the Primary Futures podcast, we had a wide-ranging conversation about bilingual education (hamilton-trust.org.uk/primary-futures-podcast). It's a wider issue than busy teachers might have thought, so what we can do to help our young learners and their families?

A sense of self

Language is so key to our sense of self that a child who doesn't feel seen, or who is struggling to communicate, will struggle to learn and may end up displaying difficult behaviours.

The 'EAL' label tells us nothing useful about the pupil in front of us, it just says that someone in their family home has an additional language. The pupil labelled EAL in the class list could have grown up in a fully English-speaking environment, or be new to the country with parents who have no English at all. We must be curious about the pupils in our care and find out what 'EAL' means for them and their learning.

In these circumstances, every adult in the school is a teacher of English: pre-teaching vocabulary, modelling structures,

providing a receptive listening ear and bringing their gift of comprehension to the learner's gift of expression. The lunchtime supervisor must be just as on board as the class teacher.

Valuing home languages

You can make your classroom much more welcoming by learning a few words of each child's home language and taking care to pronounce pupils' names correctly. Perhaps you could you invite

parents in too, to share language as a celebration of culture and diversity? A display of all the heritage languages represented in class, will also help everyone feel included.

“The ‘EAL’ label tells us nothing useful about the pupil in front of us”

Are you a language learner yourself? If so, you can model getting something wrong in your target language and trying again. In this way, the children will learn it's ok for them to make mistakes.

Some pupils, trying to fit

learning, or on staffroom folk wisdom. However, many of the factoids out there just aren't true. Children don't learn languages more 'naturally' than adults, nor can they simply 'catch up' and become fluent in just a few months.

Schools need a nuanced understanding of pupils' language development. There are many excellent resources

freely available online, such as the tool developed by the Bell Foundation, which tracks learners' progress from absolute beginner, through basic functional competence and onto the academic fluency that takes five to eight years to develop. We recommend more specific resources on the podcast – do give it a listen.

Confident, empowered learners

Ultimately, our job isn't to turn pupils into native speakers – it's about making them confident communicators. Let's stop thinking of the EAL child as somehow in deficit; after all, bilingual people do better at university and tend to earn more in their careers. We should want for our EAL children just what we'd want for every other pupil – an environment where every child that comes through the door has the opportunity to thrive in a curriculum that meets their needs. **TP**



Ed Finch is a teacher and headteacher with over twenty years' experience. He is the host of the Primary Futures podcast from Hamiton Brookes.



Dr Eowyn Crisfield is a specialist in bilingualism, bilingualism in education, and teacher-training.



MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2
DRAMA

AND... ACTION!

SAM MARSDEN



When we first think of a fun and engaging drama class, we might picture energetic improvisation; all the children buzzing with ideas and thoroughly enjoying themselves. But contrary to this idealisation, many children actually prefer script work to improv, as scripts give them a tangible starting point. In this unit, pupils will learn how to approach a script and a character with confidence, while exploring performance, voice, and physical skills.

Hopefully, the children will feel confident enough at the end of these six lessons to share their creative work in front of an audience; perhaps to another class, in a school assembly, or for parents. If you think performing is just for the end of term, think again!

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES AT

tw **teachwire**



Download your FREE resource sheets at

tinyurl.com/tp-Marsden-Scripts

worksheet (link above), or pick a favourite of your own.

Finally, ask each group to find a space in the room to have a few read-throughs of their scripts together.



Assessment

Do pupils know who their character is, and what book, or play, their scene is from? Do pupils know when and where the scene takes place?



WEEK 2

Learning objective

- How to approach and get into character

Play a drama game from tinyurl.com/tp-Marsden-Scripts to get warmed up. Next, ask everyone to lie down, close their eyes, and imagine that they are their character. You are going to ask some questions and pupils are going to answer in character, and in their head, without calling out. Give about ten to 30 seconds between each question for pupils to form an answer in their thoughts. Explain that if they don't know the answer that is okay; it's the actor's job to imagine the answers. Here are some questions you can ask:

- What's your name?
- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- What's your bedroom like, if you have one?
- Who do you have significant relationships with?
- What scares you the most?
- What is your life philosophy in a nutshell?
- What makes you angry or happy?



WEEK 1

Learning objective

- How to approach a script

Print out enough scripts so that every pupil can go home with one. You can use the ones available at the link above, or source your own. A short script (about an A4 page) is best. Have a variety of scenes for pupils to choose from.

As a class, read the scenes together. You might choose to read them out loud yourself or have pupils sight-read them (the first option will take less time). After this, ask pupils to choose the scene they'd like to work on, and the character they'd like to play.

Once everyone has been assigned a scene, a part to play, and a partner or group to work with, get them to highlight their part. Ask them to learn the words to the script at home over the next two to three weeks.

Next, ask pupils to find out about the book, or play, their character is from, paying particular attention to when and where their scene takes place. You may like to do this by giving them access to computers, or by bringing in the books the scenes are from, or by giving a short synopsis of each scene yourself.

After this, play a drama game to help pupils feel less inhibited about performing. You can choose one from the downloadable drama games



Now, ask for volunteers to hot seat their character. The person in the hot seat should improvise, stay in character, and make up the answers if needs be.

Once everyone who volunteered has had their turn, ask the pairs and groups to find a space in the room and to have a few read-throughs of their scripts together while in character. After about ten minutes, gather everyone back into an audience and ask a few of the groups to show their scenes. Help direct these in front of the class so that everyone can learn from the direction. Explain that you'll do this each week, so that every group goes up at least once in front of the class with their scene. You might like to keep a note of who has had a go.



Assessment

Can pupils talk about what their character is like?

.....



WEEK 3 Learning objective

- What makes a good performance, and how to apply this to a written text

.....

Once again, begin the lesson with a drama game from the downloadable

worksheet to help get the class into the right frame of mind. Explain to pupils that they are going to do a presentation of their short scenes to another class, in a school assembly, or to parents, in three weeks. This can be an exciting moment to work towards. In some ways, this type of presentation can be better than a full-blown school production, because every pupil has a character to play and an opportunity to shine.

Next, split the class off into the pairs or groups they've been working in and explain that they are going to 'block' their scene. This means figuring out who is doing what and when, what movements there will be, and the location of the actors on stage. For example, they'll need to know when someone sits, stands, walks, throws a book (perhaps!), and so on. You can also encourage pupils to think about what props they might like to use. Now is a good time to talk about facing towards the audience. Give everyone about 15 minutes to block their scene and walk around offering direction to as many groups as possible.

Gather everyone into a circle and have a conversation about what makes a good performance. Ask pupils if they've ever seen a good a show at a theatre before and what they thought made it good. You might like to add in some performance pointers here, which include knowing your lines, knowing your character, fully committing to

the performance, showing emotion, being in the moment, reacting to the other characters on stage, and vocal projection.

Finally, ask a few groups (different from those chosen in the previous session) to show their scene to the class and give them some direction.



Assessment

Can pupils list three things that make a good performance? Do pupils know what blocking is?

.....



WEEK 4 Learning objective

- How to physicalise a character

.....

Ask pupils to find a space in the room. Explain that everyone is going to walk around the room at different speeds, depending on what number you call out.

Ten is the fastest speed, one is the slowest. Call out different numbers, so that pupils can experiment with moving at different tempos. Next, ask them to think about what speed their character moves at and to walk around the room at that speed. Now ask them to think about where their character might hold tension; maybe it's in the neck, jaw, fingers, shoulders, or lips. Ask the

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children to walk around the room at the speed they've chosen for their character, and with the added tension. Next up, ask pupils to think about any physical habits their character might have. Children should continue walking around the room in character while adding in a physical habit or two.

Now ask pupils where their character holds a lot of their positive energy; this could be in their lips, eyes, hands, tummies, or feet. Ask them to add this energy into their bodies and to see how this changes the movement of their character.

The children should then go and practise their scenes with their new physical traits. Finish by asking a few groups to show their scene to the class and give them some direction.



Assessment

Can pupils move in a new way and in character?



WEEK 5

Learning objective

- How to project and to speak clearly in character

Warm the class up with some tongue twisters; you can find some in the downloadable resources. When doing the warm-up, encourage pupils to speak from their tummies, to relax their shoulders, and to maintain good posture. Explain that when they are performing their scenes, projection is important, and they'll need to speak from their tummies. If they are holding their voice in their chest, throat, or head, it will be difficult to produce enough sound to be heard.

You can all experiment together by doing one of the tongue twisters in a head voice, then chest voice, and then from the tummies. How easy is it to hear each one from the back of the class?

Next, gather pupils in a circle and go around asking each child to say one line from their scene, while projecting their voice. If they speak too quietly, ask them to go again, making their voice louder.

Now ask pupils to go and practise their scenes in their pairs, or groups, and give them about ten minutes to do so. Ask them to focus on voice and projection.

To finish, ask a few groups to show

their scene to the class and give them some direction, including their use of voice.

Demonstrate how speaking in a monotone

voice is not engaging, and how texturing speech by going high and low in tone will add more flavour to the performance.

It's possible that many pupils will need to slow down their speech and be reminded to use dramatic pauses. You will also likely need to remind pupils many times to be louder.



Assessment

Can pupils use a voice loud enough for the whole class to hear? Can pupils explain how they can use their voice to make their performance more engaging?



WEEK 6

Learning objective

- To show a scripted scene to an audience

Play a warm-up game from the downloadable resources, to begin. Make sure it's one you've already played, as show day isn't the day to introduce something new.

Run through everyone's scene and make sure to give one positive piece of feedback to every pupil.

Do a vocal warm-up (like some of the tongue twisters practised in the previous week).

Just before the show give the pupils a pep talk. I find telling them they don't need to be nervous, as they are up on

stage as another character and not as themselves, helps. It can be liberating for a lot of pupils to walk and talk as another character.

Now it's time to perform in front of an audience! Another class, the whole school, or parents are all good audience options. You'll likely find having spectators pushes the pupils to the next level, as the adrenaline will enhance their performance.

If you want a more polished show, you might find two to four extra weeks of rehearsals will help, though it is possible to prepare in six weeks.

Pupils can perform with or without costumes and props. If you really want to go for it, you might like to add some music to play between scenes; something relevant in tone to the next scene works well. I often use film soundtracks and fade them out a few lines into the text. Music can help pupils get into character and ease the tension of starting a scene.



Assessment

Can pupils perform their scenes in front of an audience?



© Rosalind Hobley

Sam Marsden has taught drama for 15 years in variety of settings. She's the author of 100 Acting Exercises for 8–18-year-olds,

Acting Games for Improv, Drama Games for Early Years, and Acting Exercises for Creative Writing.

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What sets us apart is our unique cross-sector community of over 250 partners spanning 40+ industries—far beyond just tech. This collective expertise enables us to craft educational materials designed by our experienced teachers to help children explore technology as a potential career path. Visit techshecan.org

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4

Out of the Ark Music

For us at Out of the Ark, singing and Christmas go together like Father Christmas and reindeer! So we're super-excited to continue working with teachers to bring singing to every part of their Christmas celebrations. Our new nativities, The Fleece Force and Simply The Nativity, are fabulously festive additions to our 50+ tried-and-tested nativities. Plus, we have a special anniversary edition of the bestselling Songs For EVERY Christmas and it's bigger and better than ever. Packed with songs, ideas and festive fun, it's here to make Christmas a little less 'stress-mas'. Visit outoftheark.com and join in the festivities!



3



Take One Picture

Take One Picture is a national programme for primary schools. Each year, one painting from the National Gallery's collection is selected to create child-led, cross-curricular projects. You decide on the length of the project, when you complete it and how many students take part.

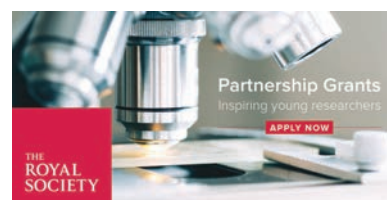
To get started, sign up for a free online CPD day led by National Gallery experts.

A member of the team will teach you about the painting and show you techniques for using art as a resource for curriculum-based learning. Spark your pupils' imagination and creativity, and inspire a lifelong love of art and learning. Head to nationalgallery.org.uk to sign up for one of our CPD days and get involved.

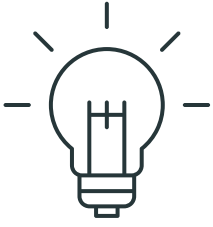
5

STEM grants

Through the Royal Society's Partnership Grants scheme, schools can apply to receive up to £3,000 to run an investigative STEM project in partnership with a STEM professional from academia or industry. The projects funded by the grants can cover any area(s) of STEM and give students the opportunity to develop and embed key skills such as research, problem solving and data handling. Projects can support the delivery of the curriculum as well as cross-curricular projects. There is lots of support available from the Schools Engagement team from online introductory sessions to feedback and guidance on applications – royalsociety.org/partnership



THE NEXT BIG THING



Sustainable supply chains

Unpack this important issue with Chester Zoo's Conservation Education and Engagement Team

[THE DISCUSSION]

RESPONSIBLY SOURCED PALM OIL

Palm oil is one of the most widely used vegetable oils today, found in 50 per cent of products on supermarket shelves ([tinyurl.com/tp-POWhatIs](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-POWhatIs)). Lessons on palm oil help students become informed consumers, and the debate around its production fosters critical thinking, allowing pupils to explore complex issues.

ADVOCACY THROUGH WORDS

Students can write persuasive essays or letters advocating for SPO, explaining its importance in protecting rainforests and wildlife. They can also create posters or flyers to raise awareness about sustainable palm oil in their school and community.

VISUALISING CHANGE

Using basic art supplies, students can create visual representations of the impact of palm oil production on rainforests. They can draw or paint scenes of rainforests and the wildlife that live there, expressing their understanding and emotions creatively. Malaysia, as a leading producer of palm oil that has increasingly adopted sustainable practices, can be the moodboard!

RAINFOREST SOUND BATH

Using simple instruments or even household items, students can create music that mimics the sounds of the rainforest. They can perform their music for the class, helping to create an appreciation for the natural world.

A VIRAL RAINFOREST MOMENT

Students can use free animation software to create short videos about the journey of sustainable palm oil. They can script and storyboard their animations, learning how to communicate complex ideas in an engaging way.

MICROSCOPE ON BIODIVERSITY

Students can conduct experiments and observations to learn about ecosystems and biodiversity.



They can create simple terrariums to observe how different plants and animals interact, discussing the impact of deforestation on these systems.

TRACKING IMPACT

Using maps and atlases, students can learn about the regions where palm oil is produced and the effects of deforestation in those areas. They can create their own maps showing the distribution of rainforests and discuss how sustainable practices can make a difference.

THE ORIGIN OF FORESTS

Students can research the history of deforestation and conservation efforts, creating timelines and presentations to share their findings. They can explore how past practices have changed and what steps are being taken today to protect rainforests.



Contact:
[chesterzoo.org/schools](https://www.chesterzoo.org/schools)

Discover More...

Ferrero, a leader in sustainable palm oil, is proud to support Chester Zoo's education programme. The company was ranked second in the 2024 WWF Palm Oil Buyers Scorecard ([tinyurl.com/tp-BuyersCard](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-BuyersCard)).

GET INVOLVED

This curriculum goes beyond learning objectives, empowering young minds with conservation-focused activities that ignite a passion for protecting our planet.

Dive deeper with Chester Zoo's resources ([chesterzoo.org/schools](https://www.chesterzoo.org/schools)) where you'll find complete lesson plans (Years 3–6 and KS3) on sustainable palm oil and inspiration for long-term school planning. You can also download the PalmOil Scan App ([tinyurl.com/tp-POApp](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-POApp)) – developed by Chester Zoo and partners – to understand which products use sustainable palm oil. Let's embark on this journey of discovery together, making a difference one lesson – and one choice – at a time.

REACHING *out*

Cate Marsden and Rachel Berry suggest ways to support children with communication difficulties

Imagine not being able to order your favourite snack, chat to the people around you, or explain why you're under the weather – because you can't say the words. This is what school is like for many children with speech and language difficulties. It's an isolating experience, which can affect a child's progress, happiness and health.

To tackle this issue early, we use a range of strategies that can build children's communication skills and improve their wellbeing.

Nurture friendships

Children who have communication difficulties often need a helping hand when it comes to relationship-building. If a child is unable to join in at breaktime or take part in games, they quickly become isolated from the social

aspect of school.

A pupil at one of our schools was situationally mute and couldn't ask her friends to play with her. So, we made 'Will you play with me?' cards, which she could use in the playground. This technique enabled her to join in at playtime and gave a significant boost to her mental health and wellbeing.

Support emotional regulation

When a child doesn't know why they are experiencing a particular emotion, it's hard for them to tell us how they are feeling so we can give them the support they need.

"It's particularly useful for us to know if there is a reason for a child's state of mind"

It's particularly useful for us to know if there is a reason for a child's state of mind. When one pupil was feeling tired and upset, we wanted to find out why. We used Widgit Symbols ([widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)), which are simple illustrations of concepts, object and ideas – such as feeling afraid or being brave – to help the child explain what had happened.

The pupil was able to tell us there had been a flood in the household, which had kept everyone awake at night. Without the symbols, we wouldn't have been able to provide the right type of support.

Reduce anxiety in lessons

Some children find it difficult to communicate orally in a classroom environment, which can hold them back from engaging in lessons. Kim Graham, lead practitioner and specialist teacher at Northumberland High Incidence Needs Team, explains how her team helped a child who was unable to speak in class.

"One of our students was experiencing anxiety and didn't want to be put on the spot with a question, or invited to share his thoughts, but he did want to show the teacher he had understood

positive home-school partnerships to reinforce everyday routines.

"Some children have become used to using visual timetables at school. These are illustrated boards which help children understand what will happen throughout the day; for instance, a visual for outdoor play followed by another one for snack time, then circle time.

"We encourage parents to use this approach at home, too. When one family was having difficulties with their child's bedtime routine, we helped them make a visual timetable with a symbol for each step including getting changed, brushing teeth, and choosing a bedtime story. The family even edited the timetable to make it personal to the child, with a pink toothbrush and a special toy."

When children feel understood, valued and listened to, they can participate fully in the school day rather than standing on the sidelines. With techniques to help them communicate, children become less anxious and more comfortable, so they can flourish at home and at school. **TP**

the lesson. To help the student participate in group learning, we gave him some symbols he could show the teacher to say, 'I know the answer but please don't ask me,' or 'I don't understand that part, could you explain it again please?' Even though the student couldn't speak in the lesson, he could take part and continue learning."

Work with families

Parents and carers play a vital role in helping their child develop communication skills; when schools and families share approaches, children make faster progress, which improves their wellbeing.

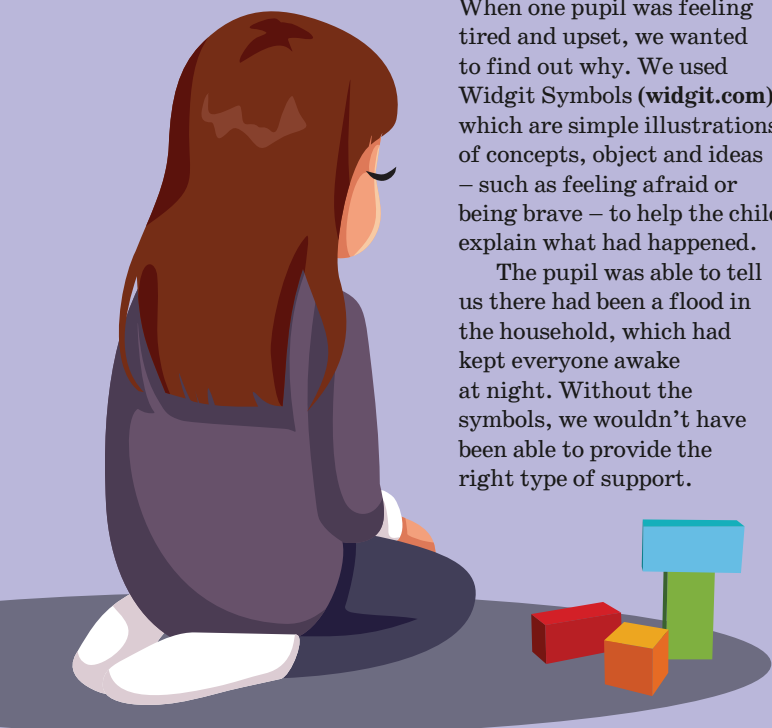
Robyn McGregor is an autism family support worker for the Northumberland High Incidence Needs Team. She recommends developing



Cate Marsden is director of external partnerships at



Woodbridge Trust, Bolton and Rachel Berry is a specialist SEND teacher at Ladywood Outreach.





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How I do it

Splat! Get hands-on with slimy science in this tactile matter workshop...

JACKSON HEMMING

1

Let's start by introducing the principles of matter; use household examples to contextualise learning. This can be a bit tricky with gases, but blowing up a balloon or getting children to wave their arms in the air can help. For liquids you can pour out glasses of water, and for solids choose a few objects with different textures

(think school jumper, plastic ruler, and wooden pencil). What can we tell about solids, liquids and gases from this exploration? How do they behave differently?



Slime – it's squishy, stretchy, jiggly and fun, but did you know it's also a great tool for teaching science? As a non-Newtonian fluid – something that acts as a liquid or a solid depending on how much pressure you apply to it – slime is the perfect tool to demonstrate the various properties of matter in an interactive and relatable way. Unfortunately, though, many types of slime are created using glue, a plastic polymer, which contributes to plastic pollution when thrown away; not very eco-friendly. So why not make your own, and get the children involved, too?

Next, get up and active with a particle dance. Divide the class into three groups, and have each one demonstrate a different state of matter: huddle together for solids, spread out in wavy lines for liquids, and shake around in a space for gases. This can reinforce the properties of matter and allow children to consider how each one behaves. Rotate the groups after a couple of minutes so everyone has a go at replicating each state of matter.

2

Now it's time to introduce the slime! I've spent months researching and testing different ingredients to create eco-friendly slime, eventually settling on cornflour, xanthan gum and water – all ingredients that are biodegradable. To make it, just mix 30ml of water with two pinches of xanthan gum in a bowl. Then slowly mix in one quarter of a cup of cornflour. You can make this at the front of the class and have the children watch, or even set pupils up in groups to make their own.

3

4

Now we have our slime, get the children to use their knowledge of the different states of matter to try to define what category the slime could fall into. Ask them to think back to the first two activities; does the slime behave like a solid, liquid or gas? This allows them to apply their learning about particles and matter to their own investigation. It's a great way to get them using their science enquiry skills and to think like real scientists.



Finally, try a comparison test. Pupils can use the scientific method to identify a question, like 'does food colouring affect the principles of our slime?'. Experiment by creating two different types of slime. Then get the children to look at the results and see what their conclusion is. It's always fun to see if your experiment answered your question. For example, does the amount of food colouring matter? Does the colour make a difference? Why do we think this is?

5



Jackson Hemming is a curiosity officer at Winchester Science Centre who's always looking for new ways to engage children with science and nature.

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A precious RESOURCE

Arts education offers so many benefits – and we underestimate them at our peril, warns **Dr Audrey Tang**

“**P**eople hate what they don’t understand,” said actress and theatre director Eva le Gallienne. Could that be why uptake in arts subjects is declining?

Arts subjects have been the focus of funding cuts for the last 14 years. The previous government intimated that this was due to a need to reduce revenue flow to what it termed ‘high-cost subjects’. However, I would argue that those high costs (if indeed they exist), often yield high returns. It’s just that it’s not as easy to measure these outcomes with simple statistics.

Treading the boards

During my time as a secondary drama teacher, I enabled my students to perform extracts from their school production (*Chess*) on the West End Stage. We earned a Guinness World Record being part of the largest number of students speaking Shakespeare at the same time at the Barnet Arts Depot, for *Richard III*, and performed our ‘school show’ musical (*Jesus Christ Superstar*) at The Edinburgh Fringe Festival. These are the things that enable a pupil to stand out from the crowd as they progress through school and college.

Furthermore, all those opportunities were made accessible with funding support from the PTA – or ‘simply’ budgeted for. I even offered LAMDA



“From primary upwards, the opportunity to work collaboratively on something creative can promote self-expression, teamwork, and problem solving”

examinations to gifted and talented students, where the only cost would be the examination fee, rather than a private charge of £30 for half an hour (in 2003) – which can make such engagement prohibitive, especially in a state school.

Every year, I also produced a staff panto, which contributed to wellbeing and camaraderie in

an ever-demanding profession. This, along with the student charity revue, enabled both staff and pupils to appreciate a different side to each other, which brought a mutual respect that transferred in behaviour across the curriculum.

Costs and benefits

So much arts teaching is extra-curricular and

voluntary. Taking into account the hours of teaching, timetable and prepping (and the rest), I once worked out that my hourly pay came to £2.75! With that in mind, let’s look at the benefits participation in the arts can produce, and why arts education should be so much better funded.

It’s well-documented that arts programmes (including creative and performing arts) can significantly enhance social inclusion and wellbeing, particularly for marginalised groups. Plus, they have the power to promote social inclusion by providing a space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together to connect, collaborate, and learn from one another. Within a production no-one thinks of



5 ways to help reverse the decline

- **Encourage the use of the arts within other subjects:** Asking for oral presentations instead of written assignments can increase pupils' confidence in public speaking from a young age. Teaching the art of sight reading will also help pupils to use bullet-pointed scripts as prompts.
- **Support local arts:** You may not be able to organise school trips to major cultural sites, but forging links with local theatres, music venues and galleries can generate just as much cultural capital for children. This has the additional benefit of recognition and support of your own community's work.
- **Encourage arts-driven events and competitions:** For example, schools that have participated in the long-established debating competition The School's MACE (esu.org/competitions/schools-mace) have seen improvements in pupils' written work and critical argument. Could a similar competition or arts festival be organised across your Trust?
- **Acknowledge the arts within other disciplines:** When engaged with cross-curricular planning, or even teacher training, make a point of recognising when the arts play a part within a subject.
- **Work with established arts providers to run 'feeder programmes':** Collaborating with established arts schools, courses, and community groups on school programmes or opportunities will not only benefit your pupils and take pressure off non-subject-specialists, but also help propagate appropriate training for those who want to work within the arts.

age, ethnicity, or socio-economic status – they care that you're part of the team.

The Ministry of Justice reports that not only can the arts raise awareness of social issues, but participation can give people a voice, break down barriers, and foster a sense of community, which deters them from crime. For the same reasons, music charity Notivate encourages young people to perform songs that express their feelings, arguing that: "Even though young people are asked to talk, when they do they still aren't always heard... when you put it in a song, people listen."

From primary upwards, the opportunity to work collaboratively on something creative can promote self-expression, teamwork, and problem solving. Simply watching or reading a play or book can be the much-needed prompt to open discussion of a challenging topic, and it's common practice within psychology to use the 'sand tray', drawing or role play to discuss what might be troubling someone. Not only that, but sometimes, if you

simply don't have the words, being able to mime, or use puppets – perhaps bang that big feeling out on a drum – can really help release tension as well as enable an individual to reach out for the support needed.

On the move

Because of the very nature of drama, pupils who struggle to sit still have an opportunity to engage, and receive praise. Putting on a play requires all sorts of skills: performance, technology, costume-design and set-building, amongst a number of other highly active things. There is always room for anyone who comes through the creative door and, importantly, an opportunity for them to become a respected and valued member of the team.

So, to anyone considering dropping the arts even further – we specialists aren't trying to undermine you. We of all people know how hard it is to be sustainable in the arts... why do you think so many of turned to teaching? But we are saying that if you remove the arts altogether, you take away the opportunity for some of those

who aren't great at convention, whose neurodiversity may not suit the formal classroom, whose talents can utilise the methods of the arts to help others to step into their spotlight. Moreover, while you may laugh at the 'inspirational teacher film mantra', there really is a place for everyone in the arts, and sometimes that welcoming acceptance can be the singular thing that changes the trajectory of someone's life.

Drama is not something to be afraid of, especially because, beyond the skills of the craft itself, there are untold benefits in the confidence, inclusivity and connectivity it brings... it's why so many of us became educators in the first place. **TP**



Dr Audrey Tang is the founder of the CLICK Arts Foundation,

a psychologist and the author of The Leader's Guide to... series.

clickartsfoundation.org.uk

Q&A

“Funding is available to help you run STEM projects”

The Royal Society’s Schools Engagement team explain how to secure up to £3,000 for your school



30 SECOND BRIEFING

Receive up to £3,000 through the Royal Society’s Partnership Grants scheme to run an investigative science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) project. An excellent way for educators to develop practical STEM experiences as part of the curriculum, or extra-curricular

What are the Royal Society Partnership Grants?

Partnership Grants (royalsociety.org/partnership) is a funding scheme for UK schools and colleges where you can receive up to £3,000 to purchase equipment to help you run an investigative STEM project. Projects are run in partnership with someone working in a STEM role in academia or industry. The grant provides an opportunity for students to develop key skills for their futures and do hands-on practical work in the classroom.

Why should my school apply?

The scheme provides an opportunity to ignite students’ curiosity and support the embedding of working scientifically. The projects can aid the delivery of the curriculum and cross-curricular projects are also encouraged. The partnerships developed are sustained and the equipment can be re-used leading to a long-term impact for the school. Evaluation of the scheme also shows that the grants can help increase teacher confidence in running practical activities.

What types of projects are funded?

Projects funded must be practical, investigative projects. The project title should be a question that the



students are trying to answer by carrying out their research. Each year a range of topics are explored. Recent projects have investigated how the biodiversity of a school’s grounds can be improved to exploring plant growth and aquaponics. To see more projects that have been funded visit the case studies page of our website.

Is there support to help apply for a grant?

The Royal Society’s Schools Engagement team are here to support teachers throughout the

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Contact:
education@royalsociety.org

royalsociety.org/partnership

0207 451 2531

application process. If you are interested but not sure where to start we recommend attending one of our free online intro sessions, which can be booked via our website. There is also guidance on the website, including project plans which can be used to form an application. The team are always available via email or phone to answer any questions and provide feedback on ideas.

How do I apply?

Applications are open and a link to the form can be found on our website. The application process is in two stages and you must have your STEM partner in place before you apply. Whilst the application has to be submitted by the school, the STEM partner can support with completing the application. The next deadline for applications is the end of November and remember the team are always available to provide support.

Why apply?

- + Receive up to £3,000 to purchase STEM equipment for your school.
- + Develop a long-term sustainable relationship between your school and a STEM professional.
- + Projects support the curriculum and can help with the embedding of working scientifically

Spark a passion FOR SCIENCE

Teaching pupils to think and act like scientists is the key to unlocking the subject for every child, says **Darren Eales**

Around 24 months ago, I noticed my colleagues had lost their love of science – and this was impacting the pupils. Too many teachers felt it an insurmountable chore to set up practicals, opting instead for worksheet-led lessons.

This is not uncommon: the 2017 ‘State of the Nation’ report of UK primary science found that only 30 per cent of primary school SLTs thought that science was ‘very important’ as part of their curriculum.

It’s important to nurture a love of science in primary education if we want children to continue to study the subject into secondary and beyond. So, as someone with a lifelong love of the subject, I decided to make it my mission to reignite a passion for science across my whole school.

Practical, practical, practical

I believe that to teach science effectively, and to ensure every pupil has the best possible experience, you need to encourage children to *be* scientists. You can’t simply rely on imparting your own (or someone else’s) knowledge. Learning how and why something works, testing theories and ideas, getting things wrong and working out why, are all crucial in science and, most importantly, for generating a love of the subject. Practical science helps bring theory to life; and learning

by doing, makes it much more impactful.

In my mission to get people feeling more passionate about the subject, therefore, I focused on bringing it to life through more practical and investigative work. I also tried to create links to science across the curriculum.

Creating a buzz

I began by introducing bee hives into the curriculum. This gave children first-hand access to different strands of the science curriculum including studying the

lifecycle of the bees, the colony, honey production, pollination and the lifecycle of plants. The children harvested and sold the honey, linking the project to topics such as food safety, production, marketing and accounting (maths).

Robotics and plant biology

We linked our Year 5 curriculum to our whole-school plant biology one. The children learnt about building and coding a robot to harvest and plant crops on Mars. They also investigated the different

conditions required to grow crops. The children built robots using the LEGO Education SPIKE robotic kits purchased from a grant awarded by Let Teachers SHINE. They then programmed their robots using the same kit.

Outdoor learning

We’ve used our forest school for a wide range of science lessons for each year group, including bug hunts, tree identification and the lifecycles of plants and animals. The project has also linked to PSHE and has been used to not only enhance the

them to investigate how the heart and circulatory system work.

In all the projects, we challenged pupils to find things out for themselves. From looking inside a hive to better understand the lifecycle of a bee, to having the freedom to design and build a working machine, everything was geared towards getting children excited about science and discovery.

“The use of ‘pupil voice’ has proved that science is now a subject that the children really enjoy”

biology strand, but also to create a great place for children to relax, play and de-stress.

Healthy hearts

Linking it to biology, maths and PE, I introduced a healthy hearts project and raised money to purchase outdoor gym equipment and an electronic orienteering kit. These have been used to improve children’s health and to create interesting ways for



Overcoming the challenges to practical science

The main obstacle we faced when introducing these new projects into the curriculum was funding. I had to spend considerable time canvassing and applying to local organisations, national societies, and competitions to raise the funds required. There are some great places to look for funding. Local authority schemes, grant making organisations and charities have been a lifeline for ensuring I could put my ideas into practice.

It was also important to ensure staff were confident

in delivering practical science in the classroom. To build confidence and develop skills, we delivered whole-staff training in practical science. We used some of the funding I'd received to pay for external CPD, which covered an array of more specialist training including beekeeping, orienteering and teaching robotics.

Gauging the impact

So, has it worked? In short, yes. The main measure of our success has been the huge increase in pupil engagement with science. In children's workbooks we have seen incredibly detailed investigations, and real-life photos and videos uploaded to

their online accounts. These have allowed pupils to share their experiences with their families. In fact, parental feedback has been fantastic, with many wanting to get involved and even recreate some of the experiences at home with their children.

Teachers have reported that the focus on a more practical science curriculum has led to a steady increase in pupils' confidence and understanding of science. It has also improved their communication skills, teamwork and leadership.

Our new way of teaching science has introduced children to novel ideas and theories, and has demonstrated how scientists work. Teachers have noticed that it has provided the children with skills and attitudes that are not only invaluable in learning science, but which can also be applied in other subjects and

their everyday lives.

The use of 'pupil voice' has proved that science is now a subject that the children really enjoy and that they would want to follow further into their education.

Changing the teaching of science to a much more practical curriculum has required long-term commitment and yes, it has been challenging! However, it's been worth it, as our new hands-on, inquiry-based approach has raised the profile of science across the school and made it much more fun to learn *and to teach*. **TP**

LIGHTING THE FIRE

- **Survey both children and teachers** – What would help them enjoy science more? What is stopping colleagues teaching practical science?
- **Weave science into as many subjects as you can** – Think about how to feature it in PE, maths, DT, computing and geography lessons. Let the children know how many professions scientists are engaged in, from baking to hairdressing, and sports physio to engineering.
- **External funding is available** – Search the internet for different types of funding to help you set up after-school clubs and purchase equipment. Let Teachers SHINE, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry and STEM Partnership Grants are just a few of the options available.



Darren Eales is science subject leader at Broughton Primary School and winner of Primary Curriculum Leader of the Year at the Tes Schools Awards 2024.

WHY I LOVE...

Newly appointed assistant head and STEM professional development leader, Thomas Mullins, discusses why more schools should embrace the National Centre for Computing Education's I Belong programme.

ABOUT US:

NAME:

Thomas Mullins is assistant head at Plymouth Grove Primary School, which is attended by around 455 pupils, many of which are from a lower socio-economic background.



Talking About:

I BELONG: ENCOURAGING GIRLS INTO COMPUTER SCIENCE



“ How did you find out about the I Belong programme?

I've always had a passion for developing pupils' interest for STEM subjects, especially for children from a lower socio-economic background. As a school where 57 per cent of pupils are on free school meals and female pupils are typically not enthused by STEM subjects, I wanted to show all students – girls especially – that computing and technology is for everyone. By engaging with our local Computing Hub, I saw the impact the I Belong programme was having in the arena of secondary education and decided to introduce it to my pupils, with a collaborative project where girls from Year 4 to Year 8 have worked to build a 'city of the future'. This has presented STEM and computing as practical and enjoyable subjects.

“ Why do you believe it's important for more girls to study computing at primary?

At our school, I lead a hybrid-learning platform and can see how girls are using the technology in creative ways. There is a big disengagement between a digital focused environment and the subject of computing due to the perception of it being stricter and less creative and hence less appealing to girls. While boys might be more outspoken, girls can come up with some incredible ideas when given a chance. That's why it is important to create an environment that is inclusive, collaborative, and where any child can thrive, no matter their gender or identity.



Contact:

Find out more about the I Belong programme at teachcomputing.org/i-belong



“ How has the I Belong programme positively impacted your school?

The student event we had was a big success. The female STEM Ambassadors were incredibly relatable and inspiring for our pupils. One of our Year 4 girl's interest in STEM and computing was invigorated, and her confidence improved greatly. Year 6 students were able to see how they can progress in their studies while Year 8's had a chance to gain leadership experience. The evident shift in attitudes has also interested other pupils across the school and more girls want to be a part of future activities.

“ What's next for your school?

The CPD that is part of the I Belong programme has given me the tools and approaches to bring out more diverse voices in the classroom. As an assistant head coming into my new role, I am looking forward to inspiring my colleagues and having a whole-school approach to the I Belong programme. Together we can create an inclusive and thriving environment for all our pupils, and prepare them for the exciting technological future.

WILL IT WORK FOR YOU?

- I Belong is an evidence-informed programme that helps overcome barriers to girls' participation in computing
- Teacher CPD is designed to provide tools and approaches to start making a difference today
- Free resources, activities and student events will help enrich your pupils' learning
- The programme is funded and supported by the Department for Education



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School improvement advice
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MIDDLE LEADERS | CPD | SUBJECT LEADERSHIP



The dangerous MYTH OF MORE

sustainable. Schools, along with children, are able to morph and adapt to any changes that happen. It just needs careful future planning.

Hard truths

A head teacher might be in a school for 20 years, and the community may love them and see them as an effective and brilliant leader. The reality is that when they leave they will be forgotten in terms of day-to-day functionality within a few terms at most (in reality, within a week). The role will need to be filled with a new head teacher, but not all roles need to keep on going as they did. Even school leader roles have changed over the years. The same can be said of teachers, learning mentors, office staff, caretakers, governors, sports coaches and teaching assistants.

One of the most harmful ideas I constantly come across in schools is that 'more is better'. In particular, this is often centred upon people or money. There is this idea that if people leave then life will become unbearable in the school. But no one individual is, or should be, thought of as irreplaceable.

There is also the argument that more money will solve the problem. Schools need to be funded better, but

they are not, and therefore wishing for a money tree is just a waste of time. We need to make the best of what we have got, even when we make our case for more funding and the counter-argument that less money and continued efficiencies improve performance.

That more is always better, and less is bad, is not the full story. The truth is that throwing money at a problem is often a recipe for disaster, and rarely

I have never heard of a school finding £30,000 stuck down the back of an interactive whiteboard; we have to treat finances very carefully at all times. We usually know our budgets pretty far in advance – give or take a small increase or decrease; therefore, we need to budget within our resources and always think ahead and build our plans around this reality.

Difficult decisions

Early on in one of my headships, I had to make more than £250,000 of cuts in the budget. This huge amount meant I had to plan a restructure and make a

considerable number of redundancies. Once I had finished the business plan I shared it with all the stakeholders, including parents. I was new to the school community and wanted to impress them, but here I was cutting the budget and my ‘so-called’ leadership was now seen as ‘taking away from the school’, making it weaker.

I still remember the parent session with a sense of dread: a busy school hall and many angry and emotional people. At one point, a parent whose child was very unwell stood up and said to me, “On your head be it!”. She was crying and

she said it. What do you say to that? I felt terrible, but it changed nothing. I still made those people redundant. If I hadn’t, the school would have been hundreds of thousands of pounds in debt within a few years. Many years later we were functioning at least as well and no longer had a deficit budget. That parent was also singing the praises of the school and the provision for their child.

Weathering moments and sticking to difficult decisions is critical, even when every fibre of your soul is screaming at you to stop what you are doing. Living in the moment in schools can be a great challenge, and in that moment all can seem lost.

The business meeting in which the cuts were agreed and the dates set for telling the staff still sticks in my memory. I hadn’t been at the school long and I



Preparing for procurement reform

The way in which primary education budgets are spent will change significantly as the Procurement Act 2023 comes into force. The new regulations aim to make the transition from EU to UK law post-Brexit more transparent and straightforward. However, there is currently a lack of understanding among SLTs as to how this will affect day-to-day practices.

One key change of the Act is likely to be the refinement of procurement notices. These notices will now be required throughout the lifecycle of the procurement process, from planning to tender, contract award, contract management, and termination. Schools and trusts must improve training, upgrade data management and ensure e-tendering systems can handle these new demands.

A new centralised digital platform for procurement will be rolled out in phases. This will bring all procurement-related information into one place, including data on both available suppliers and those not eligible to be awarded public sector contracts. Register at the government’s Transforming Public Procurement page (tinyurl.com/tp-Procurement) to get the latest updates and ensure your organisation is receiving the best return on value, and complying with the new procurement requirements.

The new legislation also replaces existing

procurement processes with two competitive routes plus a direct award option:

- Open procedure – A single-stage, unrestricted competition.
- Competitive flexible procedure – Allows schools and trusts to design their procurement processes.
- Direct awards – Enables contracts to be awarded without competition in specific situations.

Schools and trusts can continue to use frameworks and existing DPSs (all DPSs will end in October 2028).

Open frameworks will now last for a maximum of eight years to allow for more frequent appointments of new suppliers. This should enhance flexibility in procurement, and reduce the exclusion of smaller or newer suppliers. Additionally, Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS) will be removed, and Dynamic Markets introduced, which will require a


Tender Notice for each procurement and cannot be used for contracts below threshold. For schools and trusts using a framework or DPS set up under the Public Contract Regulations 2015, those rules will still apply when awarding contracts under those agreements.

If you’re responsible for budgets but unsure how the rule changes will affect you, reach out to procurement organisations such as YPO (ypoc.co.uk) for practical advice. Partnering with education procurement services can extend the capabilities of internal teams, offering expertise and resources that might be otherwise inaccessible. You can watch a webinar from YPO all about procurement reform at tinyurl.com/tp-Reform, and take a look at tinyurl.com/tp-RefEducation to learn more about procurement reform in education.



Michelle Walker is head of procurement services at YPO. She is an award-winning procurement professional with extensive experience

in the public sector.

 ypoc.co.uk



“Early on in one of my headships I had to make more than £250,000 of cuts in the budget”

felt terrible that my early legacy was one of taking away, breaking down what was seen from the outside as a brilliant school and making it less. In that moment I couldn't see the future and therefore I just felt the awful sense of a journey that I didn't want to take, and on which I didn't really know where I would end up. I could have asked the governors to take on the process but knew that I had to do it myself – it was vitally important in terms of my role as school leader that I did it, and looked each and every person in the eye as I did. I believe that learning to get through these moments is another key reason I have been a headteacher for so long.

Sticking with it

In every situation where, in the moment, I have felt powerless and wanted to run away, there was always a future moment where, on reflection, I have felt proud that I managed my way through it and almost always look back to realise that the decision was the right one and for the better. There is nothing wrong with imposter syndrome when the decisions are so critical.

In every case like this, I still feel that I cannot take for granted that everything will be alright in the end. There is always that niggling sense that this is awful... But I steady myself for making the right long-term decision despite this uneasy feeling.



Brian Walton is an award-winning headteacher and popular education blogger. His latest book, Lessons

from the Head's Office, explores how to face the challenges of leadership without sacrificing your principles or wellbeing.

tinyurl.com/tp-HeadsOffice



Budget boosters

Alternative revenue streams can boost budgets and help schools deliver the best education for their children without compromise, while contributing to 'big ticket' items when capital expenditure isn't available.

FACILITIES HIRE

Make money from your existing assets by turning your school into a community hub and a venue for hire. You can offer your school field and playground to local sports groups and hire out the school hall for everything from Scouts and Brownies to knitting circles and keep fit classes. Regular hirers can generate a consistent income.

DON'T FORGET THE PTA

Ask your PTA to lead on general fundraising to subsidise trips or other 'extras' or give them a target amount to raise, such as for new PE equipment.

COMMUNITY ACTION

Sometimes you might need to raise money for big ticket items, such as an outdoor classroom or a new playground. If it will require more donations than you can raise from parents and families alone, you can open the net wider with a crowdfunding campaign. It's easy to set up a crowdfund online and your pledge for donations can be shared with your local community and businesses and promoted through your social media. Platforms such as Rocketfund and DonateMySchool

GRANT FUNDING

As well as Grants 4 Schools and FundEd, specific funding pots are available for sport, STEM, music and the arts, innovation and disadvantaged pupils. Local housebuilders often have a community pot in the area where they are developing homes, too.

Once you've found funds you want to apply for, consider hiring a bid writer to apply on your behalf. As well as giving you a better chance of success, some bid writers work in return for a percentage of awarded funds, so there's no upfront outlay.

Jackie Keegan is resource advisor at HFL Education.

hfleducation.org

4 REASONS TO TRY... Take One Picture

An inspiring primary art project from the National Gallery

1 SPARK YOUR PUPILS' IMAGINATIONS AND CREATIVITY

Take One Picture is a national programme for primary schools. Each year, one painting from the National Gallery's collection is selected to create child-led, cross-curricular projects. You decide on the length of the project, when you complete it and how many students take part.



4 BE PART OF A CELEBRATION AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Every year the National Gallery exhibits projects from schools across the country in its Take One Picture exhibition. You can submit your finished project for a chance to be part of a celebration at the National Gallery.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Contact:
Head to nationalgallery.org.uk to sign up for one of our CPD days and get involved.

2 DEVELOP CHILDREN'S VISUAL LITERACY, SPEAKING AND PRACTICAL SKILLS

After taking part, teachers report a marked increase in their pupils' critical thinking, vocabulary and practical skills. Projects are shaped by the children as they explore the themes of the painting.

3 LEARN HOW YOU CAN USE ART THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM

Take One Picture explores how one painting can inspire learning across the curriculum. A free online CPD day will teach you about the painting and show you techniques for using art as a resource for curriculum-based learning.

At a glance

- + Attend a free online CPD day with National Gallery experts
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Getting to grips WITH MATHS

Learning the history of manipulatives made me a better teacher, says **Ian Connors**

As an NQT in 1995 (it was painful to type that!), I set up my first classroom with a rolling blackboard and packs of chalk that might seem positively Victorian to ECTs in 2024. On the blackboard there was a set grid for ‘doing maths’.

When it came to teaching mathematics, our resources were relatively straightforward. There were various ‘manipulatives’, used primarily for children who struggled with maths. I remember experimenting with these – trying to figure out their uses – but I can’t recall much except for boxes and boxes of rulers.

At the time, I didn’t know much about the origins of these manipulatives or their creators; they just seemed to be a standard part of the classroom setup. It wasn’t until later that I discovered the rich history behind them – something that has since become instrumental in my own development of maths resources.

Dienes blocks

One notable creator is Zoltan Dienes, a Hungarian mathematician and refugee who made a significant impact on maths education with his development of Dienes blocks, also known as base ten blocks.

In the 1960s, he introduced these manipulatives with the belief that concrete models were crucial for understanding mathematical complexities. His blocks, representing

units, tens, hundreds, and thousands, were designed to simplify the base ten system. Dienes was convinced that hands-on experiences could bridge the gap between concrete and abstract thinking, offering students a solid foundation in number sense and place value. His resources became widely used, demonstrating the global appeal of concrete learning. Dienes’ beliefs would be borne out in research projects worldwide.

Cuisenaires, Multilinks and beyond

As my teaching career was getting started in the 1990s, a group of educators were developing Numicon, a tool that is today widely used to help children understand the number system. Meanwhile, I

investigated other influential tools, such as Cuisenaire rods – created by Georges Cuisenaire in the 1950s to help visualise mathematical relationships – and Multilink cubes, invented by Philip R. Moore in the 1970s to use for a variety of maths concepts.

A few years ago, I began to explore some new ways to represent numbers concretely. My love for LEGO, both as a child and a father, inspired me to think creatively about how ‘numbers’ could be connected and built, similar to how LEGO bricks link together.

I wanted to retain the proportionality of Cuisenaire

rods, where each rod’s length corresponds to its value, and preserve the colour coding that helps children visually and physically understand numerical relationships. The idea was to combine these features with the familiar holes of Numicon but in a way that offered a linear concept of number rather than in frames. The linking system had to allow numbers to be connected end-to-end and from above, enabling children to ‘build’ number walls and lines, thus adding a new dimension to their understanding of numbers.

And so, n-bars were born, deeply rooted in the legacy of

“I began to explore new ways to represent numbers concretely”





earlier manipulatives (tinyurl.com/tp-NumberBuilders). The brilliant primary team at Collins then developed a comprehensive programme of support around n-bars, Number Builders, including engaging characters the Numberinis, easy-to-use planning, and a wealth of classroom resources which, crucially, include number lines and number squares that perfectly fit with the n-bars.

The aim throughout was to help teachers provide their students with the best possible maths experience.

The intention is not to replace other manipulatives but to build upon the innovations of previous creators, offering students new tools to deepen their understanding of numbers.

Learnings from manipulatives

From my experiences and a review of the literature, I've learned that integrating manipulatives effectively can significantly enhance maths education:

- Children gain a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts when they can physically manipulate objects, making it easier to grasp abstract concepts later.
- Manipulatives make maths more engaging. Pupils are more likely to participate actively and enjoy learning when they can interact

with physical objects.

- Manipulatives support visual and kinaesthetic learners, helping them understand concepts that might be challenging to explain to them using traditional methods.
- For children who struggle with abstract thinking, manipulatives offer a bridge that makes complex ideas more accessible.
- Manipulatives enable students to explore and discover mathematical concepts on their own, leading to a deeper, personal understanding of maths.

“Integrating manipulatives effectively can significantly enhance maths education”

The CPA approach

While some might advocate for a more paper-based approach to ‘real maths’, I believe there is a growing clarity and confidence in the CPA (Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract) approach. It’s about making maths accessible, engaging, and meaningful for all students. By integrating manipulatives into learning in meaningful ways, we can transform how students understand and interact with maths.

Traditionally, the CPA approach has been seen as a step-by-step process. It starts with concrete manipulatives, where children get hands-on with physical objects to really explore mathematical ideas—

like using blocks to understand place value. Then they move on to the pictorial stage, where those physical objects are represented through drawings or visual models, helping to bridge the gap between the hands-on experience and more abstract thinking. Finally, students reach the abstract stage, where they work with symbols and numbers to solve problems, having built a solid foundation through the earlier stages.

Recent research suggests we don’t need to stick to this sequence so rigidly. Being a bit more flexible—allowing students to revisit the concrete or pictorial stages as needed—can reinforce their understanding and enhance problem-solving skills. This adaptable approach not only makes it easier for students to grasp complex ideas but also keeps them engaged and confident in their learning journey.

The CPA approach is more than just a teaching method; it’s a pathway to deeper understanding and lasting

confidence in maths. By fully integrating manipulatives into our teaching, we can unlock the potential of maths for every learner.

Understanding the history of these resources helps us appreciate their value and how they have been designed to support teachers and enhance student learning.

Making things fun for everyone

Reflecting on my long career in education, I’ve always aimed to make learning enjoyable for children, and maths is a subject that beautifully supports a wide range of other learning. Manipulatives play a crucial role in helping children connect more holistically with mathematical concepts, providing key foundational learning. The history of maths teaching shows a clear

trajectory towards a more inclusive and engaging approach, with manipulatives firmly at the centre of this evolution. By understanding and appreciating the history and development of these tools, we can continue to enhance the way we teach maths, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed and enjoy their mathematical journey. **TP**

Top tips for integrating manipulatives

1 START EARLY AND USE OFTEN: Introduce manipulatives in the early years and continue using them throughout primary school. There’s even potential for a manipulatives revolution in KS3 and KS4.

2 MODEL THEIR USE: Regularly demonstrate how to use manipulatives during lessons.

3 ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE: Allow pupils to choose and use manipulatives during independent work.

4 INCORPORATE INTO HOMEWORK: Send home manipulatives or suggest household items that can be used similarly to reinforce learning outside the classroom.

5 CREATE A MATHS MANIPULATIVE STATION: Set up a dedicated area in your classroom where students can freely access and experiment with different manipulatives.



Ian Connors is a former headteacher and advanced skills teacher in primary

mathematics. He is the series editor of Number Builders.

tinyurl.com/tp-NumberBuilders

Collins

Number Builders

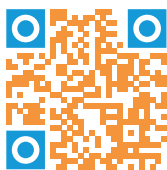
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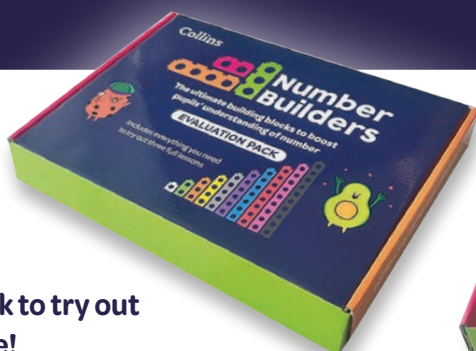


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The big PICTURE

Seamus Gibbons and Emma Lennard take a look at what we should be striving for in our maths teaching

As primary teachers, it is our job to ensure all our pupils master the primary curriculum before they enter Key Stage 3.

The basics

As children work through the curriculum, they will become more confident in mastering its three aims as laid out by the DfE:

- **Fluency** – Children should become fluent in the fundamentals of mathematics, including through varied and frequent practice with increasingly complex problems over time, so that pupils develop conceptual understanding and the ability to recall and apply knowledge rapidly and accurately.
- **Reasoning** – Pupils must learn to reason mathematically by following a line of enquiry, conjecturing relationships and generalisations, and developing an argument, justification or proof, using mathematical language.
- **Problem-solving** – Children should be able to solve problems by applying their mathematics to a variety of routine and non-routine problems with increasing sophistication, including breaking down problems into a series of simpler steps and persevering in seeking solutions.

In order to deliver these curriculum such that our pupils develop and consolidate their understanding of these three curriculum aims, we need to think carefully about our use of resources and lesson design.



The research

Ofsted's 2021 review into maths teaching ([tinyurl.com/tp-OfstedMaths](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-OfstedMaths)) includes a number of suggestions that are useful to bear in mind when planning and delivering the maths curriculum at each primary stage:

- Teachers must close the entry gap in knowledge relating to facts, vocabulary, symbols and concepts.
- The teaching of facts should be sequenced so it helps pupils to learn methods.
- Teaching should be clear and systematic.
- We should aim for pupils to become proficient as this develops motivation and confidence.
- Pupils need regular opportunities to rehearse what they have learnt.
- Assessment should focus on component knowledge (assessing what has been taught) as this is more useful for gap analysis.

- Written work should be systematic and orderly as this supports pupils in avoiding errors and seeing connections.

Recent research from the Educational Endowment (EEF) also provides primary teachers with useful recommendations for improving mathematics.

The organisation's EYFS and KS1 research ([tinyurl.com/tp-EarlyMaths](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-EarlyMaths)) suggests five key recommendations:

1. Ensure teachers have a secure understanding of how children learn maths.
2. Provide wider opportunities for pupils to apply maths throughout the day.
3. Make use of manipulatives and images to support understanding.
4. Ensure new learning builds on existing knowledge.
5. Ensure additional support is of a high quality.

For KS2, the EEF puts forward eight key

recommendations for teachers to consider:

1. Make effective use of assessment.
2. As above, use manipulatives and images to support teaching.
3. Specifically teach children how to problem-solve.
4. Support pupils to make connections in their mathematical knowledge.
5. Support pupils to be motivated and independent in maths.
6. Ensure the resources used and tasks set support learning meaningfully.
7. Ensure that additional support/interventions are of a high quality.
8. Ensure procedures for pupils transitioning from Year 6 to 7 are meaningful.

You'll notice that some of the findings from Ofsted and the EEF align, which can help us be strategic in selecting appropriate, research-informed strategies to support our teaching of maths. **TP**



Seamus Gibbons is the executive principal of several London primary schools and leads the primary teacher training programme of the country's largest multi-academy



trust. Emma Lennard is an independent primary curriculum advisor, working with schools across the country.

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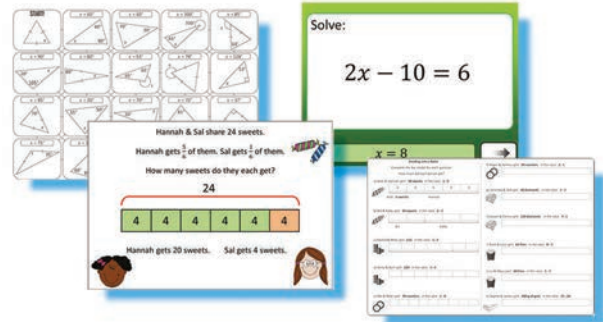


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But is it ART?

Believe it or not, maths can be beautiful, says **Jacob Merrill**

Artworks crafted by pupils can evoke a sense of beauty. In fact, all kinds of emotional reactions can be expressed when children bring home something they have created; it forms part of their value. Likewise, mathematics possesses its own form of beauty. But can children create this themselves?

To some people, the idea of a mathematical creation alone is unimaginable – let alone a beautiful one. We can show children examples like the Fibonacci sequence in sunflowers.

We can enthusiastically say, “This is maths! Isn’t it beautiful?” But is it the children’s maths?

There is the sense of determination and accomplishment in finding a route to a mathematical solution, but it is still a predetermined destination. It’s harder to envisage the originality and ownership a painting can have existing in maths.

A grand tour

By achieving conceptual understanding, children can tour new mathematical worlds. But are they only

seeing points of interest – like a slideshow? Going beyond being a maths tourist requires creating new pathways, which can seem daunting. Francis Su (tinyurl.com/tp-Su), argues that you don’t need to be an advanced mathematician to imagine these. He believes that something as simple as a date can be explored mathematically through

“There was exhilaration and pride upon making discoveries”

posing questions and creating fanciful properties. With a similar mindset, I’d like to suggest how mathematical worlds can be created that evoke emotional responses.

Crafting your questions

I present and alter tasks in the form of ‘What if...?’ questions. By modelling such questions to children, they begin to do the same and create their own mathematical worlds.

Understanding of what constitutes a meaningful question occurs over time, with experience and with the right inspiration.

For example, in one lesson, I presented the children with the first diagram in Figure 1, and introduced the following ‘What if...?’ questions: *What if we multiply and divide by 10, 100 and 1000 to complete*

the circular chain? What if each number along the chain has to be different?

The task had multiple solutions – the second part of Figure 1 shows one example.

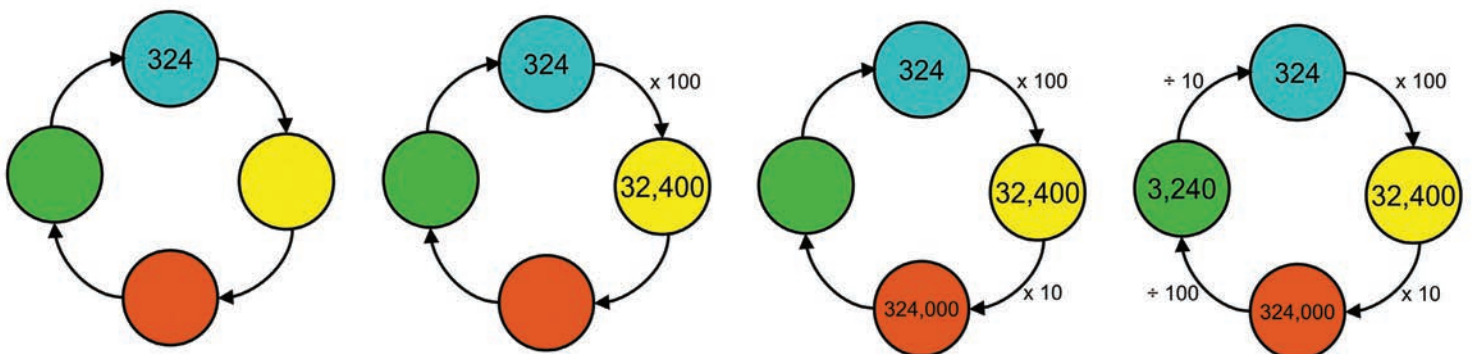
These solutions became the subject of creations for pupils. Once they had explored the problem, they sought to imagine: *What if we have five, six or seven numbers in the chain? What if we cannot use the same operation twice? What if we cannot use the inverse of an operation?*

Crafting your questions

By keeping the initial scope small, the children had room for their own creations. Each was named after the poser. One memorable example was ‘Jessica’s simultaneous chains’ (shown in Figure 2). Jessica asked: *What if we have two circular chains? What if, in the second chain, the same number cannot be in the same position as the first chain?*

When she came up with this idea, I felt confident in saying that no-one else in history had contemplated it before. It was an original creation. Pupils quickly became invested in the problem, sharing new findings excitedly. We extended and explored how many simultaneous chains were possible. There was exhilaration and pride upon making discoveries. At one point, a child asked if he could use powers of ten beyond 1000. He stated that it was ‘a cheat code’ and his cheeky grin suggested that he thought his creation had an element of naughtiness. It was amusing to him – an emotion attributed to his creation.

Figure 1. Creating from a ‘What if...?’ question



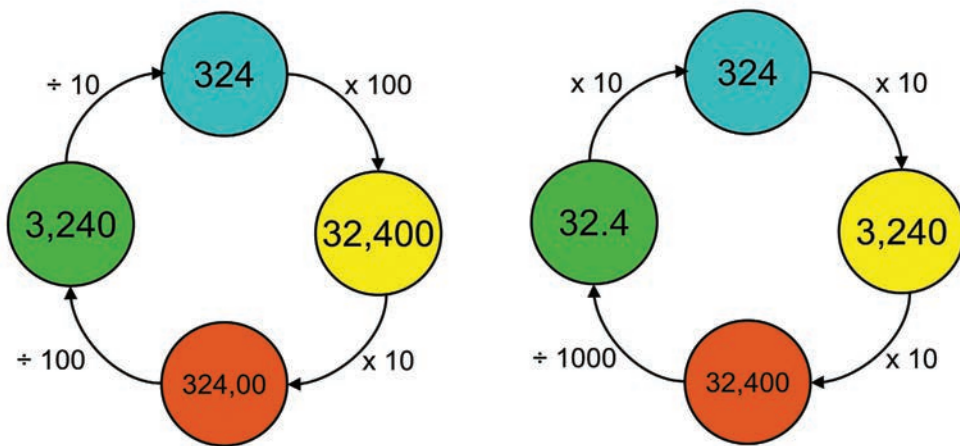


Figure 2. 'Jessica's simultaneous chains'

An element of doubt

Throughout this exercise, there was genuine uncertainty among the children about how their findings would play out.

Uncertainty is one of the most powerful motivators – writers use this when they lead readers to moments of tension. The children understood that they might not reach an answer, and they also knew that I was not going to give them one. For one thing, I didn't know what

it was, but it also didn't matter to me. This world held value in the fact that it had been created by them.

In navigating its paths, they were emotionally reacting with frustration, triumph and sometimes with surprise. If I had said at the end, "This is the answer!", it would have been akin to me scrawling all over their artwork.

Of course, the tension of uncertainty can also be felt by the teacher, and sometimes that can reach

fear. What if the exercise leads to nothing interesting? Is this burdening the children with too much?

The secret here is to keep the starting points small and accessible. And by working regularly in this way, children gain confidence in their creativity and, over time, build more complexity into their solutions. Without such opportunities, children will always find creating difficult.

Exploring to this depth also takes time. Stopping too early in the example exercise would have blunted their curiosity and devalued their creations. I hope that by giving pupils the power to explore, it will foster a productive disposition of curious and creative learners and develop their strategic competence (Fig. 3).

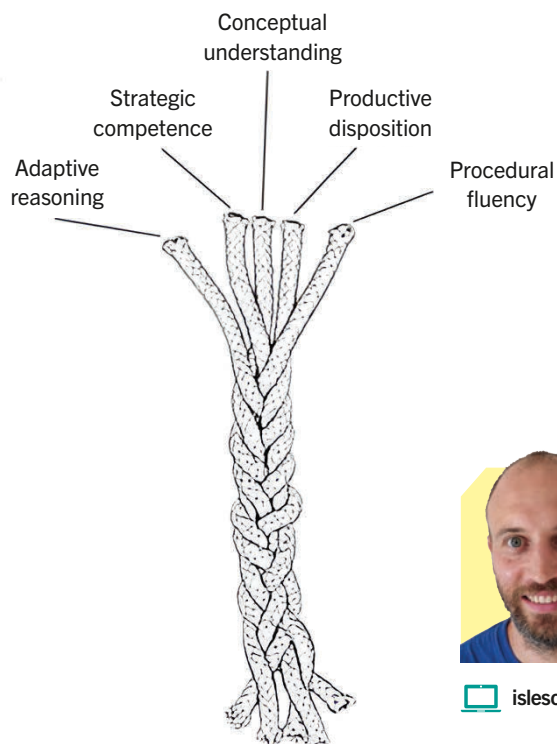
I don't have the authority to decide whether their work constitutes mathematical creations. However, I will keep telling children that they are. I think these pieces of work have aesthetic and emotional value – that they are worthy mathematical pursuits and that they are original. **TP**



Jacob Merrill is a Year 4 teacher and a trustee for the Association of Teachers of Mathematics. He shares open-ended tasks on his website.

islesofwhatif.com

Figure 3. Intertwined strands of proficiency



Cultivating a culture of creativity

Changes in attitudes and actions won't happen in a single lesson, but, rather over time. If you want to start this journey with the children in your class, here are some things to be mindful of along the way.

- Use open-ended tasks and model their introduction and evolutions with 'What if...?' questions. There are plenty of sources for these: NRich, ATM publications; and I share many on my website too.
- When introducing open-ended tasks, keep the initial scope small. By doing this, you give the children room to expand on them through their own 'What if...?' questions. They might be more obvious ideas at the start, but over time their creativity will grow.
- Name pathways and discoveries after the children. Empowerment like this will encourage them to value their own and others' ideas.
- Be brave and be prepared to head towards and maintain uncertainty. Rather than providing them with answers, ask them to justify their beliefs instead.
- A few pathways explored deeply are more meaningful than ten explored superficially. Encourage a community that shares ideas and healthy questions each other rather than individual pursuits.
- Provide them with time to explore. Their investment might lead to them choosing to carry on at break times or at home. Encourage this! It can be a great way to build in parental involvement in maths, too.
- Explore maths tasks yourself in the same way to embrace and promote the culture shift.

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Everyone's A WINNER

Playing games in maths lessons means all pupils come out on top, even when they lose, explains **Nicola Adams**...

To the untrained eye, gaming in the maths classroom may present as time away from delivering the curriculum, or missed learning time. But when planned and executed well, this couldn't be further from the truth.

For one thing, you can't underestimate the impact of fun when it comes to learning. Taking in the classroom environment, buzzing with excitement as children try to outwit their opponents in games; the 'oohs' and 'aahs' you hear when they hit on something brilliant, or realise they've been trumped by a friend are a joy to behold.

There's no threat, or rush to get the right answer, and no pressure. And in plenty of games (such as the idea listed at the end of this article) there is both an element of luck, and an element of skill that will develop the more pupils play.

Play nice

When children play games, over time, they develop social skills. Those experienced with tabletop games may have already developed the ability to take turns, listen, and react appropriately when they win or lose. Some may not be so experienced; that's where you come in.

When modelling a game, why not play a

couple of 'teacher vs class' rounds under the visualiser? On your turn, voice your inner monologue out loud. Why are you making each choice? What will you say if they beat you? What will your body language be like? What about if you win?

Gain insight

Observing and talking to children during games also highlights how they're thinking, what skills and knowledge they already have, common errors and misconceptions, and what might need further teaching.

Pupils also develop fluency when playing maths games. For instance, when calculating scores, or as in the game below, the

difference between card values, children will rehearse key maths skills. Observe them as they do this; it can be hugely enlightening. For instance, can you see your pupils making jottings or using formal written calculations? Are they counting on their fingers to add or take away? Are they counting in other ways, such as nodding their heads or tapping their legs under the table? When you talk to the children, are they talking about base facts? For example – using the game below as a model – can players explain that when calculating $13-4$ they are moving through $13-3-1$? Or even better, that they simply know that $13-4 = 9$? You can also check

if pupils use rebalancing when taking away, such as calculating that the difference between $235-98$ and $237-100$ is the same?

This is a great chance to help children move from inefficient counting strategies and towards efficient calculation.

Provoke reasoning

Once children have played a few rounds of a game, we can often see that through repeated turns they have made generalisations and understood 'rules'.

Talking to the children hopefully shows that their thinking has deepened, and that they've developed a strategy for gameplay.

For example, if the game requires calculating



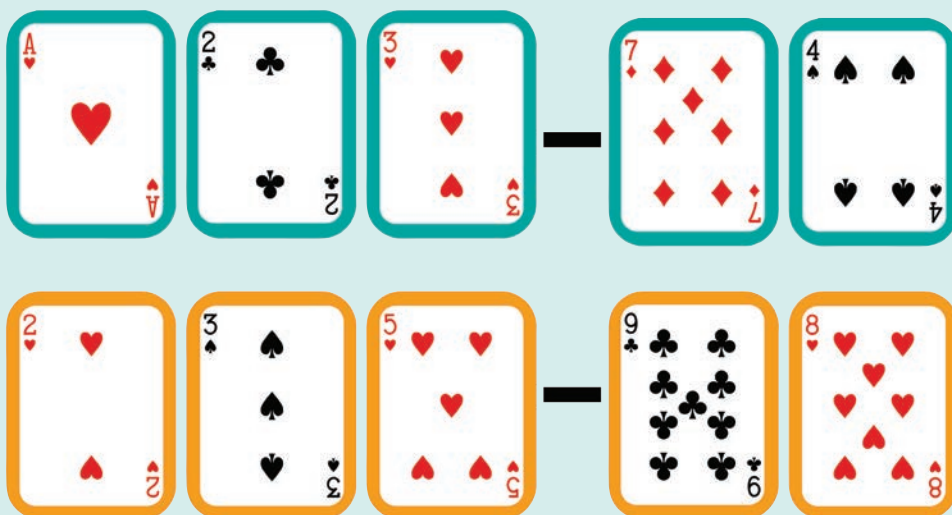


Fig.1

the difference between two numbers (as in The Winner Takes It All, explained below), pupils may have realised that the smaller the first number (the minuend) and the larger the second number (the subtrahend), the smaller the difference between the two.

Sentence frames can be useful to get children thinking about these concepts during a game. Try these:

If...then...

I have noticed...

Family fun

When pupils have played a game at school a few times, why not consider inviting families in for a gaming session along with their children? Provide resources so they can continue this learning together at home (see the download box above for a free gaming mat and instructions for Winner Takes It All).

Alternatively, you could film a round of the game and share the recording along with the rules on your class webpage or app, and let families know that it's there to enjoy.

What about evidence?

Sometimes, we can feel under pressure to have evidence of learning

in the children's books. The question is, though, how we can make this both manageable and purposeful for our pupils. After all, that should be the rationale behind recording anything at all, right?

You could pause during a game to ask your children a question. This might be as a whole class, or even at a table or with a pair of players.

Provide sentence structures to help pupils jot down ideas in their books, such as:

- Why did you make that choice?

I chose to... because...

- What do you hope/predict is going to happen?

I think that...

- Which strategy did you use?

I... because...

- Can you think of another way of doing it?

I could...

Alternatively, at the end of the game you could ask questions such as:

- What skill/strategy did you use?

I... because...

- What did you/other players do well?

I noticed that...

- If you played again, how might you play differently?

Next time, I could...

- How could you change the game to make it easier/harder?

I would... because...

Give it a go

Opportunities for assessment are plentiful during a maths gaming session. If modelled well, children will become engrossed in the game and therefore immersed in the learning. You can observe and interact with pupils in the moment to determine the security of their understanding and level of efficiency.

Alternatively, take a guided group for some pinpointed teaching (in use of base facts of the strategy of rebalancing, for example) to move their learning on while they play.

Winner takes it all

The aim of the game here is to collect the greatest number of cards. Firstly, remove the 10s and picture cards from your pack, then deal each player five cards. Arrange the cards in any order on the playing mat (a free version is available at the download link above. The player with the smallest difference collects all cards used in that turn. When there aren't enough cards left, the player with the most cards wins.

See Figure 1 for an example of the layout. You'll notice that player one has $123-74=49$. Player two has $235-98=137$.

Player one wins this set, with a smaller difference of 49.

If children need to

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tinyurl.com/tp-GamingMaths

reactivate knowledge of the definition of 'difference', try using a whole-part model to illustrate the whole, the known part, and the unknown part (the difference). This game is also a great opportunity to rehearse subtraction.

You could use Winner Takes It All in Y4 as part of the teaching sequence, or during a fluency session to secure learning.

You can also use it in Y5 or Y6 to reactivate prior learning before working with increasingly large numbers within multi-step problems. **TP**



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tinyurl.com/tp-MathsChallenge

Signs and SIGNALS

Topsy Page explains how to take oracy to the next level in your classroom

Imagine a classroom where every child speaks confidently. Where every child can be clearly heard sharing their individual thoughts and ideas. A classroom where children work productively in pairs and groups, where children support and challenge each other, listening with respect and encouragement.

How about a classroom where everyone knows that talking can help us think and thinking can help us talk? Where children express themselves clearly, are interested in each other's thoughts and ask each other questions because they know it helps them learn?

Oracy makes all this possible. It gives children a chance to develop a voice and be able to use that voice effectively in relationships, in work, in life. If children can't do these things, they won't thrive – oracy is a matter of social justice, citizenship and democracy.

Three essential ingredients

Oracy in primary classes means managing classroom talk to deepen learning across the curriculum, and equipping your pupils to use spoken language effectively in any situation. For oracy to flourish, it's

“Please elaborate, Jack.” or “Say it again, Simran, using our focus vocabulary.”

Use a kind, respectful tone at all times. (This is not about mocking or intimidating pupils.) If a child doesn't immediately respond during whole-class talk, stay with them, support

3. Create a culture of listening

For children to talk confidently, and to risk sharing thoughts, emotions or new ideas, they need to feel safe. They need to know they will be listened to with respect, and that everyone will value their contribution. Creating and agreeing ground rules as a class will help with this.

“The use of signals like these can offer a number of benefits to children”

vital to have the right classroom culture. This can be achieved by focusing on three key areas.

1. Have high expectations

All your pupils can get better at communicating, so avoid underestimating them. Children respond to our expectations, so try to phrase the way you speak to them according. For example,

them and find out what they are thinking.

2. Be caring and thoughtful

All children have different starting points, and some are initially less confident with their oracy skills. Without losing your high expectations, be sensitive and nurturing. This can be a delicate balance; the key is to challenge at the appropriate level.

Hand signals for dialogue

Use active learning gestures to indicate ‘I agree’, ‘I disagree’ or ‘I'd like to build on...’ Decide on a set of non-verbal signals to indicate thinking during whole-class dialogue. Aim for still, silent signals, which are less likely to be distracting than moving or noisy ones.

- Some examples could be:
- Open hand resting on heart – ‘I agree.’
 - Closed hand on heart – ‘I disagree.’



- Thumbs and index fingers make two interlocking circles – ‘I have something to say that connects.’
- Index finger up – ‘I have a question.’

Give pupils opportunities to practise these hand signals before you begin using them in lessons.

Discuss how the timing of hand signals matters, and the pros and cons of showing signals while people are talking. Discuss the possible effects of ‘jumping in’ with a disagreement signal when someone is still making their justification. It’s essential that your class use hand signals respectfully, and that this fits with your class ethos of respectful listening and positive attitude to learning.

The use of signals like these can offer a number of benefits to children. Firstly, they give pupils a non-confrontational mechanism through which they can challenge each other.

This changes everything! They now have permission to query what is being said, spot misconceptions, respectfully disagree and so on.

Gestures can help class dialogue go deeper as well, as pupils can ask peers why they disagree with them or look around for classmates who can support their point;

thinking becomes visible, and everyone can see when others are listening. Everyone has a chance to show their opinions, even if there is not time to offer every child the chance to speak.

Finally, hand signals can help pupils to self-regulate – if they can show their thinking, they are less likely to shout out.

RAG cups

A powerful tool for assessment for learning, and talk. RAG cups are red, amber and green paper cups that some schools make available to every child in all lessons. The expectation is that children will continuously reflect on their learning, asking themselves ‘How is my learning going?’ throughout the lesson, and using the cups to signal their current thoughts to the teacher and TA.

The different colours are used to indicate the following opinions:

- Red – ‘I’m stuck’ or ‘I disagree’
- Amber – ‘I’m a bit confused’ or ‘I have a question’
- Green – ‘I understand’, ‘I can teach others’ or ‘I agree’.

Give a set of cups to each child; the cups stay on tables at all times. Tell the

class to start each lesson by stacking their cups with green showing. As the lesson progresses, they are responsible for changing the colour to reflect their learning status.

During whole-class learning, if you spot a child on amber or red, pause, and use pupil talk to progress. For example, ask another child, whose cup is showing green, to explain. (The cups develop accountability as well as oracy – children on green are expected to be able to give peer support.) If you see a lot of amber or red, consider alternative strategies, including different ways to explain.

When pupils are working on their own, if peers notice someone on red, they can provide support: “Are you OK, Emeka? Do you need help?”. Likewise, as adults circulate the room they can quickly notice who needs support: “I see you’re feeling unsure, Amy – why are you on amber?”.

RAG cups are brilliant when pupils present work to the class, as children can change their cups if they spot any errors and then explain and make suggestions for improvements.

They can be used during whole-class or group dialogue too, with children using their cups to signal

agreement or disagreement.

Make sure you invest time in this strategy to properly reap the rewards, and be consistent with your expectations. This is about children gaining the habit of reflecting on their learning continuously. **TP**


FOUR WAYS TO ELEVATE ORACY

- Don’t label pupils as ‘quiet’ or ‘shy’. A label can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children are developing all the time and it’s our job to help them. They may not be speaking much simply because they haven’t had the opportunity to find their voice.
- Value all accents and dialects – they are an important part of the children’s identities.
- Know why you’re doing it. Familiarise yourself with the underlying purpose of each idea, so you can choose the right approach for the right moment and use it skilfully.
- Stick to it. While some strategies can have immediate results, others take longer to bear fruit, because they are about a change in culture. Remember that new habits take time to embed.



Topsy Page works with schools to develop a culture

of high-quality dialogue and reasoning across the curriculum. She is the author of 100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Oracy.

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Grow a BACKBONE!

Pie Corbett shares his expert advice on how to create a reading spine

Imagine a school where, from Foundation to Year 6, children experience a minimum core of about 80 carefully selected books. These ‘essential reads’ would be the finest literature available, and would create a living library inside each child’s mind, providing a common, profoundly conceptualised set of literary experiences.

In many settings, their teacher is the only person in a child’s life who reads to them. So, although time in school is limited, if we don’t read great books to some of our pupils, then, sadly, no one else will. And by ‘great books’, we mean quality literature – books that are beautifully written and so deeply imagined that they stay with the reader forever, altering how they see the

world and what understand about the human condition. Such books pass on an eternal truth about what it means to be human. They are the sort of book that will be important as an informed or imagined experience forever.

Choices, choices

Every year of my teaching career, I would spend time deciding which books I should read to my new class, and I published my first suggested reading spine about 25 years ago. For Key Stage 2, I selected six core novels a year, plus one picture book. I chose that number because it leaves space for new publications, novel enthusiasms and books that speak to the moment.

The idea is for schools to choose a core that ensures every child access to the best books available. However, it is important to leave some leeway and space in the programme – certainly, one picture book a year is not sufficient at Key Stage 2.

For EYFS and Key Stage 1, I selected 12 core picture books a year plus some suggested early chapter books. This number should be increased considerably by careful selection of ‘essential reads’.

When I created the first spine for a school, I spent six weeks of the summer holidays with piles of books on the sitting room floor. At first, there were too many in each year group. I found that

setting myself a target of only six novels or 12 picture books a year forced me to make choices.

Every book had to justify its place, so I asked myself the following questions:

- First of all, is each title an outstanding book that every child should experience?
- Has each book been tried and tested in the classroom, and is it a story that children still love? (Many of the so-called ancient classics such as *Treasure Island* bit the dust at this point.)
- Am I selecting a range of quality authors, avoiding over-emphasis on any single writer?
- Am I including books written in a range of writing styles about different themes?
- Are there links across the years so that children revisit core literary themes?
- Have I ensured diversity of authors, writing from a range of cultures about varying experiences of life?

A library of one’s own

I strongly suggest you discuss these questions and criteria with colleagues, and develop a reading spine for your own school.

Once the spine has been agreed, then the school can resource the core texts with at least a half-class set of each book. Given limited budgets, this may take several years to work towards, but the aim is that children can at least share a book.

“Pupils would encounter books that are beautifully written and so deeply imagined that they stay with the reader forever”



Practicalities

The impact of your reading spine will hinge on whether children are read to daily, and it's essential that you get a school-wide strategy in place to ensure this happens. During the EYFS and Key Stage 1, this can take place at various times of the day to build the amount of reading that children experience.

These reading sessions are not the time to stop and ask questions, but rather for stories to be experienced simply for the pleasure of a great read. It is worth remembering that pausing to quiz the children associates reading with being asked questions, interrupts the flow of a story, and may mean that it is harder for a child to tie the scenes together and comprehend them.

At Key Stage 2, teachers should devote a core time in the day for reading aloud to the class. Schools need to ensure that this happens through the year, and does not get lost amongst the myriad of other pressing demands. Many teachers blend books together, so that a challenging picture book might run alongside a poem that illuminates the same experience or theme.

Daily read-aloud sessions are where children experience books that they could not read to themselves; in these sessions, pupils have access to high-quality and challenging books that would otherwise not be experienced.



Other books by the core authors, or on similar themes, should be kept in the library area. These can be introduced through weekly 'recommendation sessions' with children being given space for their own 'recommended book' displays.

Over time, a school's reading spine will shift and change in the light of new books and authors. However, the central core is a child's

enables pupils to discuss how texts can be seen from the author's, the narrator's and different characters' viewpoints, as well as how different readers might view a text.

Keeping momentum

Once the basic reading spine is in place, the next step is to develop a poetry spine.

This could be built around simple ideas, such as a one anthology per term alongside a different poet.

Finally, schools can begin to think about which non-fiction texts they want every pupil to experience.

Familiarity with great titles provides core book knowledge. This is the school's reading spine; a mapped-out book curriculum that provides the basic entitlement to experience great literature. **TP**

“Great books begin to build frames of reference that children can use when meeting a new text”

entitlement to experience great literature, ensuring diversity and quality. This should cover literature in its broadest sense (novels and picture books, non-fiction and poetry).

Great books begin to build frames of reference that children can use when meeting a new text. For instance, once a child has spent time with Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* – for example, working for a week or so considering the four characters' viewpoints – the book becomes a frame of reference for exploration of other narratives. This



Pie Corbett's Reading Spine and Page Turners can be

found at shop.scholastic.co.uk/piecorbett

WHY EVERY SCHOOL NEEDS A READING SPINE

1 Teachers will become familiar with the core texts and learn how to draw on them for developing comprehension as well for teaching writing.

2 It ensures that all pupils at every level have a minimum, quality entitlement.

3 Not all teachers are familiar with a sufficient range of titles and, without guidance, may overdose on one or two authors ('death by Dahl').

4 Teachers may struggle to distinguish between a modern classic and a book that is entertaining, but hardly memorable. A reading spine removes the need to make these decisions.

5 If children are not used to reading, discussing and understanding challenging literature, then they will not be able to cope with the end-of-primary tests (certainly in England, given the challenge of the Year 6 reading SATs), let alone the secondary curriculum or beyond.

6 The right range of reading develops the intellect, alongside a deep appreciation of literature that opens up world culture.



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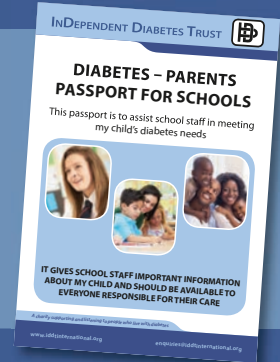
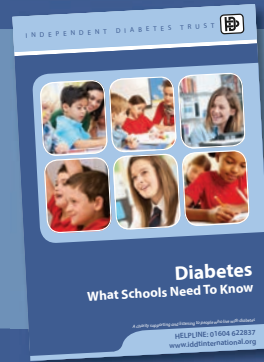
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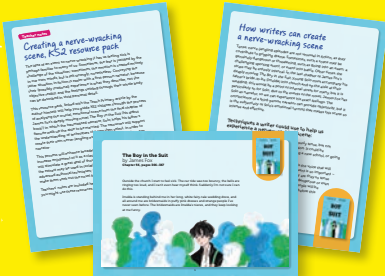


WAGOLL

The Boy in the Suit by James Fox

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a nerve-wracking scene

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

The *Boy in the Suit* is a middle-grade novel which follows ten-year-old Solo Walker and his complicated mum, Morag, as they struggle through the cost-of-living crisis. As a means to survive, the duo sneak uninvited into strangers' funerals, seeking food, warmth, and somewhere to be. The title refers to the ill-fitting, second-hand suit Solo must wear to blend into the funeral crowd. Naturally, the pair are eventually caught gate-crashing, and their already precarious world is tipped on its side.



The Boy in the Suit (£7.99, Scholastic) is out now.

Solo, our main protagonist, must grapple with the impact of his parent's decisions, while learning that sometimes grownups have fewer answers than children do. Alongside their public shaming, he must learn to navigate family, school, and a budding friendship. Morag, embattled by failing mental health and media intrusion, is driven into hiding, leaving Solo to deal with problems that even adults scarcely know how to solve.

The story follows Solo and Morag as they transition from one normal to another, experiencing the good and the bad of the systems and community around them. There are unexpected kindnesses, thoughtful gestures, funny moments, and occasional

missteps and oversights by the people surrounding Solo. Ultimately, the same systems and community come to their aid and help clear the path forwards with humour and care.

While the story oscillates between serious and funny, there is plenty of nerve-wracking action. My personal key to create a nerve-wracking scene is to establish a character's comfort zone, then write the exact opposite. Solo's comfort zone is any situation where he is alone, not being perceived. He hates being looked at and speaking in public, often flushing bright red when simply answering a question in class. What better than a ceremonial role in a grand church wedding, then, to illustrate Solo's nerves and provide an opportunity for character growth? **TP**

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE A NERVE-WRACKING SCENE

REVERSE YOUR CHARACTER'S COMFORT ZONES

Get to know your character's safe space, then flip it upside down. If they love staying indoors, put them on a mountain during a storm. If they typically avoid the spotlight, put them on stage with a mic and a hostile audience.

AMP UP THE SENSES

Nervousness comes with distinct bodily

sensations. Describe what your character is experiencing through sight, sound, touch, and smell. Hone in on body parts that may betray nervousness: a churning stomach, trembling hands, a rapid pulse.

USE RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Express doubt and concern by using rhetorical questions in thought and dialogue. Will it be okay? What's going to happen? When will it be over? Answer these questions in the action.

CHOOSE AN IMPOSING SETTING

Certain settings have anxiety built in. Choose one with an element of risk, danger, grandeur or tension to it. Describe it in detail and make it seem alien.

DESCRIBE THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Have your character ruminate on their biggest fear. Is it fainting? Falling over? Describe their most dreaded outcomes in detail to create a vivid sense of anxiety.



Extract from

Chapter 56,
pages 366–367

Churches can be daunting spaces – places of ceremony and grandeur, with an element of theatre. Large and imposing, the church contrasts with the meek personality and stature of the young protagonist.

Outside the church I start to feel sick. The car ride was too bouncy, the bells are ringing too loud, and I can't even hear myself think. Suddenly I'm not sure

The repetition of the adverb 'too' indicates the excess of Solo's sensory experience. His senses are overwhelmed beyond comfort by these unfamiliar surroundings.

Solo being perceived strangely by the bridesmaids adds a sense of awkward self-consciousness, adding to the overall discomfort of the scene and adding a 'fish out of water' feeling.

I can do this.

Imelda is standing behind me in her long, white fairy-tale wedding dress, and all around me are bridesmaids in puffy pink dresses and strange people I've never seen before. The bridesmaids are Imelda's nieces, and they keep looking at me funny.

Solo's attire is used throughout the book to represent his circumstances and state of mind. Here, a hot and sticky suit represents the formality of this occasion, a constraint that adds to the stress and bodily discomfort of nervousness.

True to form, Solo ruminates on worst-case scenarios through rhetorical questions.

I feel hot and sticky in my new suit, and a part of me wishes I was wearing my old baggy one instead. I shouldn't have eaten so much breakfast. What if I throw up and ruin the wedding?

A shaky hand starts to rub my shoulder.

"Bit nerve-wracking, isn't it, Solo?" Imelda says, bending down to whisper in my ear. She smells of flowery perfume and powdery make-up. She's trying to make me feel better but her voice sounds trembly and scared. "I feel the same, don't worry. I never actually thought this day was going to come!"

A key theme of the book is the imperfect nature of parents and adults, and this remains true in this scene. Although Imelda attempts to calm Solo's nerves through dialogue, her body betrays her trepidation, doubling the sense of unease in the scene.

Use of sound descriptors representing Solo's internal and external environments adds a sense of inescapable confusion and sensory overload that is common with anxiety.

I don't dare reply in case my breakfast reappears when I open my mouth, so I nod and focus on the stone floor, my heart pounding like an orchestra of drums in my chest. Organ music starts to blare out. My tummy somersaults and I plead with it to stay inside me where it belongs.

Imelda squeezes my shoulder even tighter now. "You've got this, Solo. Just like we practised. Pretend that nobody's here."

When calm, we mostly feel in control of our own bodies. By pleading with his body to play along, Solo narrates a lack of control and heightened nervousness. His tummy 'somersaulting' affords it agency and casts it as an opponent.

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Published by Puffin, 2024

Flower Block

Scale a magical plant and unearth your colourful community with this fairytale exploration of home and nature

JO CUMMINS

Flower Block is Lanisha Butterfield's debut picture book, inspired by her own childhood. She wants to represent children like her – from tower blocks and council estates, from biracial or single-parent families – in a positive light as she aims to challenge misconceptions of council estate life. It is so important that children are exposed to books that reflect the realities they live in, and that provide windows into the lives of others.

The book is a glorious fusion of the fairytale and the everyday, with a

magical plant bursting up from the seeds planted by Jerimiah and his brother. As it snakes up through the floors of their tower block home, the brothers run to apologise to all their neighbours and discover a varied array of people, all keen to join them on their adventures. But what will be waiting for them at the top of the beanstalk? And what will their grumpy neighbour, Old Man Crisp, have to say?

It's a great story for exploring ideas of home and community, and the power of nature to unite people.

Cover reveal

Really looking closely at the cover of a book is a good way to get children thinking about what they are about to read by inferring information, and making links to pre-existing knowledge and experiences. There are lots of details in this front cover for pupils to explore and ponder over. Here are some questions you could use to promote discussion:

- What is the title?
- What do you notice about the style of font used for each word in the title? Why has the illustrator done this?
- How is the title a play on words?



(Flower block, not tower block.)

- Who are the author and illustrator?
- What kind of building can you see? Does anyone here live in a building that's similar?
- What is unusual about this tower block? Is the plant a 'normal' plant?
- Can anyone think of a fairy story that has a giant vine in it? (Jack and the Beanstalk.)
- How many people can you see on the cover?
- What are they all doing?
- Which ones would you like to visit?
- How many pets can you see?
- Who do you think the main characters are? Why?

Writing opportunities

There are so many wonderful opportunities for creative writing inspired by the characters and events in *Flower Block*. Some ideas to get you started are:

School vine

If you were feeling really creative, you could create a fake 'vine' coming up

out of the classroom floor and back up through the ceiling as a hook into writing. If not, don't panic: a photoshopped image, or just the power of the imagination, would work just as well.

Ask the children to imagine what their classroom might look like if it were taken over by a magical garden. Would it be like a jungle? A country meadow? A tropical paradise? Looking at photos of varying types of plants and gardens might help inspire them. Different groups might like to write about rooms in the school: the hall, the head teacher's office, the music room, etc.

For the main writing task, encourage the children to think about what they might see, hear, and smell in the rooms. They should write a description of their room using appropriate vocabulary and figurative language.

Extension – the children could make 3D shoebox models of their gardens before or after writing.

What's at the top?

At the top of the tower block's vine is Flower Block paradise with a rainbow of blossoms, but what else could it be? What was at the top of the beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk?

Look at the final double-page illustration of the rooftop garden. What plants and wildlife can the children spot? What different zones are there? How are different people enjoying it?

What would pupils enjoy finding up on the rooftop? What might other people enjoy? Would this vary depending on their age group? Some possible ideas could be a crazy golf course, a waterpark, an urban beach,

or a Willy Wonka-style sweet garden.

Ask children to write a persuasive letter to the headteacher, pitching their idea to develop the roof of their school into the area of their choice.

As an extension, look at some simple garden landscaping plans. Encourage pupils to create their own plans for their rooftops.

Fairytale splice

In *Flower Block*, Lanisha Butterfield mixes some fairytale magic with an everyday urban tower block – with a giant vine sprouting up through the building. Her reasoning was that all children deserved to imagine that fairytales can happen wherever you live. What tales could the children imagine coming to life in their school or in their street? Perhaps the three little pigs might come to rebuild the

Take it further → → →

COMMUNITY LINKS

One of the key themes in this story is the power nature has to bring people together. Members of your community may be able to come into school and work with children on planting or redeveloping a small area of the school grounds. Or you could take groups of children to a local residential home or similar, to weed the gardens or refresh planters. If your setting is looking at ways to help strengthen relationships with other members of the community, perhaps pupils could plant hanging baskets or pots to give as gifts.

ARTIST STUDY

Lots of artists have been inspired by nature and the beauty of flowers. A study of some of these would work well with the themes in *Flower Block* and could inspire a whole class art exhibition or collaborative mural. Some artworks to consider as starting points could be 'Flower Garden' by Gustav Klimt, 'Flowers' by Andy Warhol, and 'Hibiscus with Plumeria' by Georgia O'Keeffe.

Discussion points:

- What types of flowers were used in these pictures?

- What colours have been used and what feeling or mood does that create?
- How have the flowers been arranged? (Bouquets, single stems, scattered.)
- What technique has been used? (Oil paints, water colours, screen printing, etc.)
- What do you like about this painting?
- What one thing would you change or add to this painting?

FLOWER SEED BOMBS

Seed bombs can be used to introduce plants to areas of land that might not otherwise have any plants. Wastelands, road embankments or wild patches are all places that may benefit. Seed-bombing can help



roof, or gingerbread people, baked by pupils, could come alive and run amok?

Depending on the age of the children you work with, you could set up and photograph a scenario based on pupils' ideas to inspire their writing. If the children are older, they could photograph or photoshop their own ideas as a starting point. You could add speech bubbles to the photos, do some drama work to explore the characters' dialogue, or use apps to animate the characters and have them talking. You could also use the photo prompts to structure and plan a lengthier narrative.

Grow your own sunflowers

This story provides the ideal opportunity for the children to

grow their own sunflowers. With strong links to the science and maths curriculums, there's plenty of scope for exploration.

Life cycle of a plant

Ask the children to observe and describe how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants. They could meet this objective by creating a seed diary for their sunflowers. Start at Day Zero with a sketch of the seed. Include details of how they potted the seed and what it will need to grow. After about a week, the first green shoots will appear, then a bud, then a bloom. The entire life cycle can take some time, so pupils may need to take their growing plants home to continue to observe and update their diaries.

Labelled diagrams

In both primary Key Stages, the curriculum requires pupils to identify the basic structure of plants and describe the functions of those parts (roots, stem, leaves, and flowers). As their sunflower seedlings grow, the children could produce labelled diagrams of them and research the role each part of the plant plays in its growth and development.

Plotting a graph

Depending on the age of the children you are working with, you could support them to collect data from the growing plants to produce a bar graph or line graph.

If you are hoping to produce a bar graph with your class, you could measure the height of all the seedlings on a given day and use that to help you decide what parameters you are going to have for your bars. For example:

Loved this? Try these...

- ❖ *Bloom* by Anne Booth, illus. Robyn Wilson-Owen
- ❖ *The Secret Sky Garden* by Linda Sarah and Fiona Lumbers
- ❖ *Every House on Every Street* by Jess Hitchman, illus. Lili La Baleine
- ❖ *Number 7 Evergreen Street* by Julia Patton
- ❖ *Seed* by Caryl Lewis

0–2cm, 2–4cm, 4–6cm. Create a tally chart of how many plants you will have in each bar then plot onto a bar graph.

You could also collect continuous data from a nominated 'class plant' and measure it at regular intervals (every two days, for example). You could then use this data to plot a line graph with 'day' and 'height' on the axes. To extend this, you could plot and compare the data of two plants in the same graph. **TP**



Jo Cummins is an experienced primary school teacher and English leader. As well as blogging about new children's books, and creating educational

resources, she has been involved in long-listing and judging national books awards. Jo currently works for a specialist educational provision in Hampshire in a teaching and advisory role.

 librarygirlandbookboy.com

restore biodiversity and create new habitats for wildlife.

How to make them:

- You need – meadow flower seeds, peat-free compost, water, powdered clay (from craft shops).
- Mix the ingredients in the ratio of 1 cup seeds, 5 cups compost, 2–3 cups powdered clay.
- Slowly add enough water to make everything stick together.
- Roll mixture into firm balls.
- Leave to dry in the sun.
- Have fun throwing them into bare patches OR bag them up and sell as part

of a class enterprise project.

HAPPY SUNFLOWERS

Sunflowers always feel like a very cheerful bloom, which is why they are the perfect way to encourage children to think about all the things that make them happy. Not only are these useful for the children to refer to if they feel they need to, but also to help the adults around them understand better how to support them.

Start with a discussion about the kinds of things that make us happy. Are there any that are the same as anyone else? Do people have different things? Depending on the age and maturity of the children with whom you are

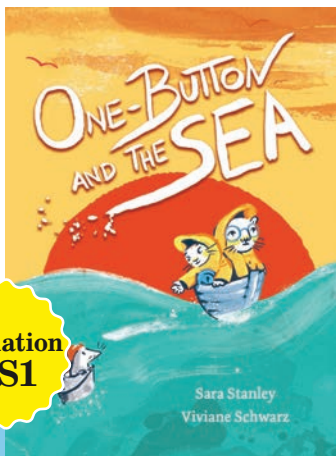
doing this activity, you might get pupils naming objects (my teddy, pizza, my cat) or thinking a little deeper (going for a walk with my dad, watching the sunset with friends, doing things to help people).

The children are going to create 'happy sunflowers', where each petal has something that makes them happy written or drawn on it. Use pre-cut petals or paper strips, which can then be stuck onto the centres of the sunflowers. For the centres, you could use paper plates or circles of card with a photo of the child stuck on. If you wanted to get a little more creative, it is easy to create a pointillism effect using a cotton bud and brown or black paint, to look like sunflower seeds.

Book CLUB



We review five new titles that your class will love



Foundation
/KS1



KS1/2



KS2

One Button and the Sea
by Sara Stanley, illus. Viviane Schwarz
(HB £12.99, Scallywag Press)

The Remarkables
by Clotilde Perrin
(HB £17.99, Gecko Press)

Pizza Pete and the Missing Magic
by Carrie Sellon,
illus. Sarah Horne
(£7.99, Guppy Publishing)

“Grandpa, tell me the story again of when we went to sea...”

Grandpa’s tale begins with *The Uprooting*, an unsettling eruption of green tendrils that forces everyone to leave their home. Taking to the sea in a hotchpotch of vessels, the animals are buffeted and soothed by waves and sunshine and must share everything they have until the wind brings ‘a new silence’ and they can go home.

Powered by something wild and fundamentally significant, this beautifully illustrated picturebook prompts us to think about loss and change. It may be read as an allegory about refugees, or interpreted in ways that speak to other experiences and concerns. But, infused as it is with wisdom and charm, it is easy to enjoy and is essentially uplifting.

Dive into this stunning picturebook to meet thirty-eight remarkable children and discover what makes them tick. Some are made of inkblots, some from roots or clouds, and many have unexpected viewpoints that really make us think. Explore their unusual worlds in a series of annotated illustrations packed with imaginative verve and style.

Translated from the French, the text bubbles with humour and emotional insight, and startling perspectives and new ideas abound. There is plenty to engage with: older readers will be rewarded as well as younger ones, and the translator’s vocabulary choices are a particular delight.

The Remarkables is a visual and verbal treasure-trove that will prompt imaginative projects and responses of all kinds. It’s also great for encouraging independent reading.

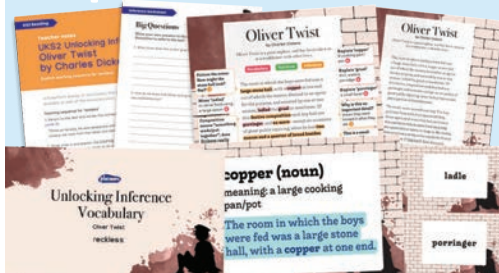
Pete and his dad are back from a road trip and are selling pizzas from their van. Magical potions should be OFF the menu, but arch-rival Peregrine Fox is using them to wreak transformational havoc and bankrupt every fast-food outlet for miles. A burning sense of injustice drives Pete to heroic heights – quite literally – as he and his friends (plus Jeremy Eyelashes, school football star, and Useless the dog) are drawn into yet another battle for business survival.

Endearingly daft, with plenty of jokes and a cheerful take on jeopardy, this illustrated standalone sequel is perfect for independent readers still building confidence. Despite the magic, the story unfolds in the real world with relatable issues that children will recognise.

→→→ **RECOMMENDED**

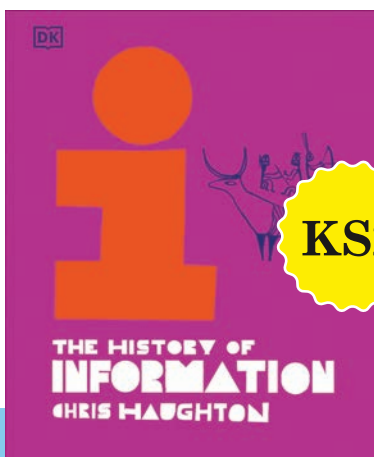
RESOURCES

plazoom



EXPLORE OLIVER TWIST IN UKS2

Part of Plazoom's powerful Unlocking Inference collection, this resource pack includes a fully annotated extract, with close vocabulary work as well as questions designed to elicit sophisticated, evidenced inferences from all pupils. A complete course of video training explains the layered reading approach that will ensure deep understanding of the text for the whole class – try it today, at bit.ly/PlzOliver



The History of Information

by *Chris Haughton*

(HB £20.00, Dorling Kindersley)

'First we shape the tools, then the tools shape us...'

From cave paintings and the earliest languages, to Big Data and AI, this fascinating survey of the ways humans share and store information is a joy to look at and explore. Clearly presented over ten well-considered chapters, this large-format hardback is illustrated in Haughton's signature style with bold graphics and an exciting palette of saturated colours used sparingly to direct the eye.

The History of Information is Haughton's debut non-fiction book and takes a fascinating look at human history from a new perspective. It's particularly good for confident UKS2 readers looking for something special to grow on, but Haughton's stylish presentation and accessible design will inspire others to explore it, too.



The Wild Life of Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals

by *Mike Barfield*,
illus. *Paula Bossio*

(£10.99, Buster Books)

From the earliest life-forms on our planet to the emergence of humans, *The Wild Life of Dinosaurs* takes a comic-book approach to this popular subject. Packed with fascinating facts, Mike Barfield's humorous text dances across the pages, mostly in chatty first-person mode (*Hi, I'm Dunkleosteus, pleased to eat you...*) but other pages including the 'Dead Cool' panels take a more traditional approach.

Paula Bossio has fun with the comic-book format – even the giant millipede is hilariously expressive – and there's plenty of dynamic interplay between the characters. Effective page design, visual clarity and a pleasing palette further raise the bar. This book is a joy to read, and children will be queuing up to get their hands on it.

Meet the author

SARA STANLEY IS AN EARLY YEARS CONSULTANT SPECIALISING IN PHILOSOPHICAL STORYPLAY. SHE CURRENTLY WORKS AS A BOOKSELLER IN NORFOLK.



What was primary school like for you?

I went to an infant and junior school which shared the same site separated only

by a white painted line in the grass. My memories of infant school are happy ones, and my mother had to peel my fingers from the fence at the end of each day as I refused to leave. Story time was the highlight of every day, and I would take my library books in to show my teacher telling her they were much more exciting than the school books. I was an imaginative and talkative child and was probably a bit much! I was usually chosen to be the lead in school plays and read out lines from poems in assembly. I think this was the start of my love of writing for an audience.

What inspired you to write *One-Button and the Sea*?

It was a story that incubated over many years whilst I worked as a teacher both in refugee camps and in areas of South Africa where life was especially challenging for young people. I wanted children to recognise that adults were, for the most part, rooting for them. The children I've been fortunate enough to share stories with have always been the hope in somebody's life, with the ability to bring about change – just as *One-Button* is to his community.

What's the most important or interesting thing about children's books that you've learned from your work as a bookseller?

The most important and interesting thing about books is that they find their reader. Building 'story relationships' with children can facilitate this: it's a really special feeling when a child engages with you about a passion, and you know exactly which books to recommend. There is nothing more exciting than watching a reader get sucked into the page of a newly discovered book.

One-Button and the Sea by Sara Stanley and Viviane Schwarz is out now in hardback (£12.99, Scallywag Press)



AVA GETS ACTIVE

Book 2 of the MASC to the eco-beat series (Music, Art, Stories, Create).

An imaginative and informative sequel to 'Ava Goes Green' by Dr Rona D. Linklater to help turn KS2 children's climate fear into climate fun!

Why choose this resource?

- ✓ **Engage** children in environmental issues through singing and performing together.
- ✓ **Confidently** deliver reading, writing and creative thinking through music.
- ✓ **A unique fusion** of fiction and nonfiction. Ava, Jamal and their friends now explore how the effects of chemical and gas pollution are affecting climate change and the habitats of creatures such as Max, the tabby cat, Ran-Tan, the orangutan and Pol, the polar bear.
- ✓ **QR codes** give access 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, out-of-hours clubs or home schooling.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Teaching information** from the **Teacher/Parent/Leader Guide** is available from my website linked to the primary grading system assessment statements.
- ✓ **The attitudes and actions** of our children towards the world they are inheriting are crucial if we are to make a difference and maintain our ecosystem.



"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!

<https://MASCinAction.wixsite.com/home>

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

Rona D. Linklater

£12.99 / 9781805144090



Uncovering **THE PAST**

Researching little-known facts from Black history is like solving the ultimate detective puzzle, says **K. N. Chimbir**

One of the things I'm asked most often as an author is "How do you write your Black history books?". I think research is the most important, as well as the hardest part of the process. The lessons I've learned about how to unearth hidden histories and sort fact from fiction are useful for anyone learning or writing about Black history – including primary pupils!

Start with a clear goal in mind

The first step before you begin your research is to determine what you are actually going to write about. That's not always as simple as it sounds. When I decided to write my latest book, *The Story of Britain's Black Nurses*, for example I had to think about who should be included in this particular history. Britain was an empire and there are more than 30 countries today whose history forms part of the story of Black British nursing.

Next, find out as much as possible about the topic. Write down what you think you already know. Suggest your pupils look for books, articles and other sources of information that have already been written about the subject. They'll almost certainly find interesting facts they didn't know before. Researching non-fiction writing involves looking for information that you want to share with others, but it's more than that – it also means learning at the same time.

When doing research, it's



important to always keep in mind what you are writing about, because sometimes you'll find out new things. That's exciting, but makes it easy to go off on tangents.

Information is everywhere

When I'm researching my non-fiction books, I love to watch good documentaries related to the topic. I also visit archives, read articles and journals. Information can be gleaned from unexpected sources too, such as toys, puzzles and games. Sometimes, interesting facts are included in leaflets accompanying the items, or even on the outside packaging.

I found lots about Mary Seacole and Kofoworola Abeni Pratt on the internet when I was researching Black nurses in history. Unfortunately, much of the information was unreliable and inaccurate. I think we all know that we need to be

cautious about information we find on the internet, but all sources should be double-checked. Books also sometimes have misquotes or mistakes, although good publishers will often have a fact-checking process. Even using oral history sources or interviewing people for more recent history shouldn't be treated as the unalloyed truth. Sometimes people simply don't remember events correctly.

I've often found different sources giving contradictory information, which means more research to find out which source is accurate. That's especially tricky when looking at things that happened long ago. We just don't always know as much about people and places from the distant past. Also, certain histories were seen as less valuable than others. We just have to accept that there will be gaps in our research because some things were not recorded.

Ask for help!

Every good non-fiction book has a section called *Acknowledgments*. This is where the author thanks all the people who helped them with their research.

When I'm researching my Black history books, I speak to many people about my project by email, in-person or by phone. I look for people who are experts, and for non-experts who I think know more than me. Most people are happy to help. They sometimes suggest other places I can look for information or they tell me about books which I hadn't heard of before. Sometimes I'm put in touch with people who have been researching the same or a related topic years before me and are happy to discuss or explain complex concepts to me.

It's hard work researching a non-fiction book but it's so rewarding when all the research comes together and you have enough information to begin writing. Then comes the next big challenge – putting it all together in a book that other people can read and hopefully be inspired by, so that they can discover more about under-explored Black history too. **TP**



K. N. Chimbir writes and speaks about Black history, and offers

virtual school visits and history-themed workshops for children. *The Story of Britain's Black Nurses* is out now.

 kandacechimbiri.com

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration into your classroom

1



Sumdog

Identify gaps and build fluency using Sumdog's engaging adaptive learning games. Proven to accelerate progress, they are fully aligned to both the national curriculum and the curriculum for excellence.

Used by millions of children worldwide, the Sumdog platform provides numeracy and spelling practice for ages five–14. It adapts to each individual, using engaging game-based

learning to motivate and build confidence.

Virtual rewards and instant feedback keep pupils motivated, and you can create differentiated practice groups to keep same-ability children together. Our ready-made informal online tests will make assessment easy for you, and fun for your class, as well.

Find out more at learn.sumdog.com



2

The Fluency Factory

The Fluency Factory scheme runs from Spring Year 2 until Summer Year 6 and is focused on improving children's reading fluency. With a focus on repeated reading, echo reading and reader's theatre, we offer daily sessions and short-burst texts to improve children's reading speed, improve accuracy and develop prosody. Carefully chosen fiction, non-fiction and poetry texts ensure lessons progress in complexity through the years. School members gain access to weekly PPTs, phonics support, challenge cards, extracts and comprehension quizzes all designed to help every young reader thrive.

Visit thefluencyfactory.co.uk

4

Ava Gets Active

(Music Art Stories Create: MASC to the eco-beat 2)

When Issy bee whispers to Max, Ava's cat, that fumes, gases and chemicals in our air and water can affect all animals, insects and our ecosystem, Ava becomes determined to find out how she and her friends can become actively involved to help limit the effects of air pollution. Four unique and engagingly illustrated stories are linked to creative and performing arts activities. Original songs and differentiated tasks are designed to prompt discussion, reinforce learning, develop communication and cooperation.

Song and instrumental parts are available online. Find out more at tinyurl.com/tp-Ava



5



Tapestry

Tapestry is the leading Childhood Education Platform helping you celebrate, support and engage with children, families and staff through Early Years and Key Stage 1 and 2, in mainstream and SEND provision. Tapestry's comprehensive, award-winning tools have been carefully designed to help schools develop a unique provision tailored to the needs of the children in their care – from forging strong collaborative partnerships with families and documenting each child's unique learning and development, to streamlining planning, monitoring and reporting processes. All Tapestry features are included in every annual subscription.

Visit tapestry.info



3

500 words

500 Words is open for entries from Tuesday 24 September! The story writing competition for children aged five–11 will be open for entries until Friday 8 November at 9pm.

Each shortlisted finalist will win a £20 National Book Token. The bronze, silver and gold winners in both the five–seven and eight–11 categories will receive a bundle of books and an illustration of their story. The gold winners will also win 500 books for their school library.

Now get writing!

Visit bbc.co.uk/500words

A whole NEW WORLD

Award-winning author **Pari Thomson** discusses her tried-and-tested ways to get children thinking deeply about books, and creating fictional places of their own devising

What is world-building? For me, it's about imagining a place so fiercely that it feels real and tangible enough to step into. It's about knowing how your new world looks – but also what the food tastes like, how the people sound, and the way the air feels against your skin. It's a multi-sensory act of creation that says to the reader, "Come in and sit down; you belong here, too."

My book, *Greenwild: The World Behind The Door*, is about a girl called Daisy Thistledown, who steps through a hidden door in Kew Gardens in London and finds herself in an astonishing secret world called the Greenwild. It's a place where plant magic is real, and where people called Botanists fight to protect plants that are under threat. A place of milk chocolate trees and giant lily-pad boats, and magical pomegranates capable of granting a single wish.

Books in school

When I deliver book events to Years 3 to 6, I usually begin by talking about my books and my inspiration –

and then encourage them to dive into a creative world-building exercise.

I discuss the books I loved as a child – ones that are full of the most astonishing, confident, glorious world-building. I'm thinking of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where it's always winter but never Christmas; I'm thinking of *The Hobbit*,

"I am always astonished by the sheer, wild creativity of what the children come up with"

where Bilbo Baggins gets swept up in an adventure across Middle Earth, with dwarves and dragons and magic rings.

What I love most are the details – the faun Mr Tumnus appearing beneath a lamppost in a snowy forest; the fact that hobbits are fond of crumpets and love to eat a second breakfast. These are the things that make the world feel tangible and knowable – so that you look up from reading with the feeling that you've been on a journey to another land.

The big question

Once I've talked about this in events, I encourage the children to create worlds of their own. This is the question I ask them: *If you could find a secret, magical world, how would you get there and what would it be like?*

I tell the children that they can work on their own or in small groups of two

volcanoes, and topsy-turvy worlds where small animals like mice are as big as elephants, and elephants are as tiny as mice.

There are no stupid ideas here – only raw creativity. More often than not, the worlds the children describe come complete with characters who have to find magic keys, or maybe navigate their way through hidden waterfalls.

The freedom to draw as well as write means the children can express the shape and dimension of the world they're creating – often producing detailed maps with labels for lakes and mountains, caves and pirate ships.

This makes me very happy, as all my favourite fantasy books have maps in the front – a promise that the world contained within will be intricate and that the adventure will unfold within a space that feels real and precise and possible to navigate with a compass and walking boots, if only you can find the way in.

By the end of the session, the air of the school hall is full of magical worlds – countless seeds for stories that are ready to take root and spring into life. **TP**

or three. I make sure that they're equipped with paper and pencils – the best tools for imagineering. And I give them the freedom of ten or 15 minutes of unstructured time to write or draw or doodle to bring their world to life.

I'm always astonished by the sheer, wild creativity of what the children come up with. There are worlds entered through tree trunks and via video games; worlds full of sea dragons and places where you'll never have a bad hair day. There are edible worlds with candyfloss trees and bubbling cheese



Greenwild: The City Beyond the Sea by Pari Thomson and illustrated

by Elisa Paganelli is out now (Macmillan Children's Books, £12.99)

Pulling TOGETHER

How can we increase parental engagement to help close the attainment gap? **Megan Morris** has some advice...

Parental engagement and parental involvement are common terms that are often used interchangeably. There is, in fact, a difference in meaning between them. While there are debates about what falls under each term's definition, a simple way of putting it would be that parental *involvement* is more about a sense of 'doing' at home or school, while *engagement* concerns the parent-school partnership. So, many parents and carers may be involved in their child's education at home or school, but the teachers and schools may not see them as engaged.

The benefits of parental engagement

There is a wealth of evidence that suggests stronger parental engagement leads to better outcomes for pupils. While improved academic performance comes to mind first, the benefits of parental engagement are not limited to that. Parental engagement helps in building a better support network for parents and carers, raising aspirations for pupils and their families alike. This happens when parents take advantage of a stronger school-home bond and improve their home learning environment with the advice and support from school, especially their children's teachers.

Effective parental engagement strategies especially help benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they will give families more confidence and ability to manage and support their children's aspirations. Stronger school-home relationships also contribute to a child's holistic development: studies have shown that greater

“Provide universal services to decrease stigma”

involvement of parents in a child's education and learning process can lead to improved behaviour, and even motivation in classrooms. Increased engagement with parents and carers is linked with better school attendance as well, helping narrow the attainment gap.

All in all, there is a plethora of evidence available that shows parental engagement should be made a priority by schools. When clear communication channels are developed, not only do parents gain a better understanding of their child's school life, they also come to appreciate the challenges faced by teachers. In turn, teachers can learn from parents' experiences and knowledge to complement their teaching and learning, fostering a positive learning environment and school culture.

Strengthening parental engagement among hard-to-reach parents

Parents' lack of education, or poor experiences with their own or other schools can make them hesitant about building stronger partnerships with their child's

current school. On the educators' side, some teachers have expressed difficulty in identifying their role in parental engagement. It can be difficult too for teachers to reconcile the need to build these relationships with the time constraints of their current role and the



daily demands of the job.

So, how can teachers ensure that their efforts towards greater parental involvement can help narrow the attainment gap even when they might hit roadblocks with hard-to-reach parents?

DON'T UNDERVALUE PERSONAL CONTACT

- Prioritise personal contact with parents to demonstrate appreciation for their feedback.
- Use informal parent engagement tactics. For example: greet and engage parents when they bring their children to school; prioritise

opportunities for parents to meet educators in the classroom; ask teaching assistants to show parents strategies for improving reading at home.

KEEP COMMUNICATION CHANNELS OPEN

- Provide parents with clear, detailed, and focused information.
- Use ICT to provide parents with information and interaction possibilities.
- Set clear expectations for families and children. The 'structured conversation' established by Achievement for All can help with this (tinyurl.com/tp-structured).
- Consult with parents regularly and communicate your findings promptly.

GIVE MORE OPTIONS

- Consider logistical challenges for parents when designing activities – fees/cost, time, and transportation could be some of the things to look out for.
- Provide universal services to decrease stigma.
 - Use a variety of strategies for engagement and let parents choose the activities they wish to participate in. You could use workshops and courses to encourage parents to become involved in their children's education. Some examples could include family literacy classes, involving parents in the classroom (e.g. listening to pupils read) or inviting them to volunteer in extracurricular activities.

COLLABORATE

Sometimes, it can be too challenging as a teacher to deal with difficult behaviours with the limited resources available.

In situations like this, collaborating with parents to

address the issues. There are several evidence-based behaviour and relationship intervention programmes available that can enhance child literacy and manage difficult child behaviour effectively. These are especially effective when employed during the early years.

Building and maintaining partnerships

Teacher–parent collaboration can enhance schools' ability for improvement while offering benefits that cannot be achieved alone. Parent partnerships must be built on trust, dedication, and drive, supported by skills and knowledge on both sides.

These partnerships should also be capable of connecting parents to the school's work through a sense of belonging. In short, successful schools are those where parental engagement is central to the school's character rather than on the periphery.

Parent communications play a huge role in establishing that trust between home and school. Parent engagement solutions power up parent communications for your school so that you can build stronger partnerships with parents.

If you would like to read more about how to employ effective parental engagement strategies, have a look at Schoolcomms' Ultimate Guide to Parental Engagement (tinyurl.com/tp-ParentPay). **TP**



Megan Morris is head of brand for cashless payments & parental engagement at ParentPay. With 4+ years in ed-tech, she has valuable insights into the challenges schools face with parental engagement and cashless payments, whilst understanding effective solutions to support modern educators.

parentpay.com

FOUR BARRIERS TO PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

1 INADEQUATE ACCESSIBILITY:

School communications that are only available via computer (but not mobile or vice-versa) or in one language may be disregarded by a large percentage of parents. So, it's important to ensure that your school communications provider has a web portal as well as parent apps to ensure the two-way flow of information. Keep an eye out for translation services that are available on most web browsers and ensure that these services are communicated to parents.

2 TOO MANY TOOLS: Try

to ensure that everyone from school who communicates with parents uses the same tools. Having to interact with a variety of messaging platforms can leave parents feeling overwhelmed and frustrated.

3 OVERUSE OF BUZZWORDS: Parents

may not be familiar with certain terms that teachers use, so it's important to check that any parent communications are free of jargon, otherwise they will fall flat.

4 EXCESSIVE (OR FRACTURED) COMMUNICATION:

Don't overdo it! Communications from various sources can cause parents to miss vital information and make it difficult for them to filter through and prioritise.



RE



The big Christmas countdown



Why do we look ahead to special events? Is anticipation more exciting than celebration?

Advent is the perfect time to ponder these big questions, says **Matthew Lane**

[@MrMJLane](#) www.theteachinglane.co.uk

For many of our students, Christmas is a very exciting time of year that is full of family, fun and presents. The countdown is just as exciting, especially with the daily dose of chocolate (although not so good for the first lesson of the day). Advent is a great topic to explore the human and social aspects of Christianity, because its traditions are not based upon scripture in the Old or New Testaments. In fact, there is no direct Biblical instruction to celebrate Advent as a season at all.

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- What Advent is
- Different ways Christians mark the season of Advent
- Why people might count down to a special event
- How seasons like Advent exist in other religions and worldviews



START HERE

Ask pupils what special events they count down to. These might be birthdays or religious holidays. Is the event on a calendar or app they use to mark the days off? Draw out as many ideas as you can. Maybe children will think of Lent, Hanukkah or Ramadan during these reflections; or you could pose them as examples for children to discuss. Then talk about why people like (or maybe don't like) counting down to a special event. Mind-map these ideas for consideration and reflection at the end of the lesson.



MAIN LESSON

1 | CHOCOLATE AND WREATHS

Begin by recapping and discussing what Advent is and why Christians celebrate the time of Advent (tinyurl.com/tp-AdventBasics).

This is a good moment to talk about chocolate, which wasn't a mainstay of Advent in Britain until the 1980s. Mention that calendars filled with LEGO, cosmetics, cheese, etc. are a very recent development.

Show a picture of an Advent wreath (or a few different wreaths) and ask children if they have seen one before. Discuss how this is also a relatively recent way of marking Advent, having only

started in the late 18th century in Germany, first used in Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches.

You could also discuss how, like many Christmas traditions, the design and meaning of the wreath and the candles have changed over time (the original wreaths had 28 candles of different sizes).

You may wish to go further and explore how Advent has varied in length throughout history and that different Christian denominations mark Advent in different ways.

Ask children to consider why there are four candles around the wreath (tinyurl.com/tp-AdventBasics). Why on some wreaths are there three purple candles and one



“We shouldn’t draw simplistic comparisons to festivals in other religions”

Give children plenty of time to think about the meaning of each passage and summarise their thinking in their justifications.

You may wish to model an example first, highlighting to the children how the activity involves retrieval and inference, so they know to use their reading comprehension skills for this part of the lesson. After the writing, give time for children to feed back their ideas to the class or their tables and compare notes. You can also acknowledge any misconceptions at this point.

3 | EXPLORING OTHER TRADITIONS

Ask children to recall their learning about other religions and worldviews. Can they think of comparable celebrations to Advent? Recap on Hanukkah and Ramadan. Are these traditions similar to Advent?

While it might seem natural to compare Advent with Hanukkah and

pink candle? Then think about the four themes that Christians explore in the four weeks of Advent: hope, peace, joy and love. How are these themes linked to Christmas?

2 | BIBLE READINGS

Move away from discussion of wreaths and give children four Bible passages to read that are often shared by Christians during Advent: Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 9:6–7, Luke 2:8–14 and John 3:16–17. Discuss why these passages in particular might be read during Advent. Draw out how only one of these is from the Nativity story.

The next part of the lesson can be a great opportunity to do some writing and undertake some sacred text scholarship.

Explain that each of the four passages the children have just read is linked to one of the four themes of Advent.

Their task is to match each passage to one of the themes and explain their thinking (the pairings are: Isaiah 40:31 = hope, Isaiah 9:6–7 = peace, Luke 2:8–14 = joy and John 3:16–17 = love).

Superficially, this should be straightforward activity, as each passage contains the word for one of the themes.



EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Have children research how Advent is celebrated in different countries or Christian denominations around the world.
- Ask children to find four of their own Bible passages, one for each of the themes. This is a chance to apply prior learning.
- Ask children to research other meanings of the four candles. Different churches and denominations apply different names, so there are many to find out about.

Ramadan, given that all three involve counting days, discuss how these comparisons can be misleading. Hanukkah celebrates a historical event. Ramadan is a month of fasting and prayer, ending in the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. The point of this final exercise is for children to see that, while easy to do, we shouldn’t draw simplistic comparisons to festivals in other religions as they are informed by different traditions and beliefs.

Matthew Lane is a teacher from Norfolk. His book Wayfinder, on how to lead curriculum change, is out now.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Why is the Advent wreath a circle?
- Why are there four candles?
- Why do Christians celebrate Advent?
- Do you count down to a special event each year?

Outdoor Learning



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to communicate effectively by giving clear instructions to a partner
- How to identify some common trees from their leaves, and use features of leaves to help group and classify them
- To observe and understand seasonal changes in trees
- How to measure the height of a tree in metres and centimetres

Into the woods: A forest school adventure



Autumn is an ideal time to explore trees in your school grounds or local area, says **Sabina Khanam**

hinghamprimary.org.uk

Environments such as woods and forests offer a rich source of knowledge, resources and activities for learning, as well as providing an ideal setting for hands-on exploration and discovery. Autumn is an opportunity to look closely at trees within these settings during a season where many are undergoing very noticeable physical changes. This session will help pupils use leaves to recognise and name trees on their site, and help them understand how trees respond to their environment as the seasons change. It will also provide opportunities to learn key vocabulary.



START HERE

Ask pupils to name the season we are in and how they can tell. One response is likely to be that it is autumn because trees are shedding leaves. Discuss



why trees, woods and forests are important. (They provide food for animals, including humans; people make objects out of wood; trees provide shade and shelter; they help prevent flooding and erosion; produce vital oxygen.) Ask why we have different trees on one site. Explain that having a variety of species on a given site reduces the chances of pests, diseases, natural disasters and other threats harming a habitat or area, as each species will react differently to natural dangers or events that take place.

MAIN LESSON

1 | SETTING OFF

As with any forest school session, carry out a pre-session risk assessment of the site and communicate relevant safety information to the group. The activities can take place in a wooded area, a local park or a school field. Begin by encouraging the children to explore the trees on site. Ask them to get into pairs with one 'seeing' person guiding a blindfolded partner safely to a tree. The guiding partner will need to communicate how to travel carefully across the area and place their partner's hands on a tree. The blindfolded person is encouraged to feel leaves,

branches, the trunk and any accessible roots with their hands. They are then taken back to the starting place, turned around three times and the blindfold is removed. They then try to recall key features of the tree to help them find it again. The pair then swap roles.

2 | LEARNING ABOUT LEAVES

Ask if any leaves helped them to recognise their tree. Highlight how, during autumn, some trees lose their leaves. We call these deciduous trees. Start a discussion about why trees lose their leaves. The main benefit of shedding leaves is that trees can preserve the moisture in their branches and trunk, instead of drying



“The activities can take place in a wooded area, a local park or a school field”

side of a central leaf stalk (e.g. rowan, ash and elder) or palmate and look similar to an open hand (e.g. horse chestnut).

Bring some practical maths skills into play, and show the children how you can estimate the height of a tree by using a straight branch the same length as your arm from hand to shoulder. Stand in front of the tree and hold the stick vertically in one hand at its lowest part.

Stretch your arm out straight in front of you. Facing the tree, move away from or towards it until the stick appears the same length as the tree. You are now at a tree height’s distance from the tree you are measuring. Place a marker where you are standing and use a trundle wheel or measuring tape to measure the distance from the tree trunk.

This should give you the approximate height of the tree. This is a good activity to do in autumn or winter, when trees have lost their leaves, allowing you to see the uppermost branches.

Explain to the children that one reason why a tree might need to be measured is to ascertain where it might land if it is felled. Another reason could be to compare the growth of similar trees. The results may indicate an area to have more favourable growing conditions, such as less exposure to the wind.

Sabina Khanam is an experienced primary school teacher currently teaching in Year 2. She is also a Level 3 forest school leader who has worked with groups across the primary age range.

out and dying. A tree without leaves is dormant and needs less energy to remain alive. Leafless trees are also better at allowing strong winds to move through the branches, which reduces the chances of damage. Can children name the types of trees that do not lose their leaves? Support pupils to name and locate deciduous and evergreen trees on the site.

3 | GETTING UP CLOSE WITH LEAVES AND TREES

Allow pupils to undertake some self-led learning, looking at whichever trees interest them.

Next, present the children with some paint swatches of autumnal colours. (These are available free from DIY shops.) Challenge pupils to

find leaves that match the colours on the strips. In small groups, examine the leaves the children have collected, and discuss their visible features.

The Woodland Trust has produced free online ‘Nature Detectives’ leaf ID charts, which can help children with this ([tinyurl.com/tp-LeafID](https://www.tinyurl.com/tp-LeafID)).

Tell the children they’ll be learning new terms to help them identify and describe leaves. These include:

- Indented or lobed leaves, which are whole and not divided to the central vein (e.g. field maple, hawthorn, oak and sycamore).
- Compound leaves, which are divided into leaflets separate from each other. These are either pinnate and grow in pairs either

EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Explain that many trees disperse their seeds during autumn, which means that they spread their seeds away from the parent plant. Go on an autumn scavenger hunt to find seeds in the woodland environment. Explore why some seeds are spiky, round, sticky, light, small or fluffy. Try to sort the seeds according to how they are dispersed (wind, water or by animals). Explain why some plants produce many seeds and why they need to travel away from the parent plant to increase chances of survival.
- Use string, fallen sticks and twigs and leaves to make shelters for animals such as visiting hedgehogs.
- Children can write their own questions to create a sorting diagram to classify leaves in different ways according to their features (lobes and leaflets). You might want to introduce simple leaves that have serrated edges, such as beech, but this will depend on the trees on your site.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- Why do some trees lose their leaves in autumn?
- How are the leaves similar or different?
- How would you group the leaves according to the features you can see?
- Why might it be important to measure trees?

Adventure TIME

Duncan Kemp offers expert advice on how to tailor your school's next activity residential

Adventure residential trips offer a unique and enriching learning experience for primary-aged children outside the classroom as they combine physical challenges with the development of key life skills.

For younger pupils (five–eight years), sensory experiences, simple teamwork tasks, and confidence-building activities are most beneficial, while slightly older children (nine–11 years) tend to thrive on more challenging physical tasks, problem-solving, and leadership opportunities.

Building confidence and facing fears

One of the most valuable outcomes of adventure activities is the boost in self-confidence that comes from overcoming physical challenges and fears.

Climbing walls, abseiling and zip wires are all excellent confidence-building activities, especially for children who may be more reserved or hesitant to take risks. The climbing wall and abseiling tower help children conquer heights, gradually increasing their sense of accomplishment. These activities are suitable for older pupils (nine–11 years) who are physically capable of handling the challenge, but younger children (six–eight years) who are more confident may also enjoy them.

Similarly, the zip wire offers a thrilling experience that helps children overcome their fear of heights while enjoying a fun, adrenaline-filled ride. It's suitable for a wide age range (seven–11 years), as



it provides a memorable experience of achievement, particularly for children who may initially be nervous.

Physical development and coordination

Archery and fencing are both excellent for hand-to-eye coordination, discipline, and focus, and are ideal for children aged eight–11. While archery requires precision and control, fencing combines quick reflexes with strategy, giving children a fun way to improve motor skills and concentration.

For younger pupils (five–eight years), sensory trails are excellent activities that involve navigating through an outdoor environment using different senses. These trails promote coordination and fine motor skills in a fun, exploratory way, and are accessible to children with varying physical abilities.

Resilience and perseverance

Some activities are specifically designed to help children develop resilience and perseverance – key traits that benefit all age groups.

Low rope courses are a

fantastic way for children to build resilience. At JCA (jca-adventure.co.uk), the course consists of low-level obstacles that require children to balance, climb, and manoeuvre through different challenges. The incremental difficulty encourages them to persist and try again if they don't succeed the first time. This is a versatile activity that can cater to all primary school ages, but it is particularly well-suited to seven–11-year-olds, who are more capable of physically demanding tasks.

Likewise, JCA run an activity named Survival, where children learn basic outdoor survival skills, such as shelter building, helps develop both resilience and problem-solving in a real-world context. This activity appeals most to the nine–11 age group, who can appreciate the complexity of the challenges and the necessity of patience and perseverance.

Solving problems

Activities that encourage children to think critically, make decisions, and solve problems in a fun, low-stress environment are

especially valuable for cognitive development.

The Laser Maze at JCA is ideal for building problem-solving and teamwork skills. This activity challenges pupils to navigate through lasers, promoting spatial awareness and critical thinking. It works well for older children (nine–11 years) who are more capable of handling complex tasks and extended periods of concentration.

For promoting problem-solving and creativity, the Egg Protector challenge and Rocket Launch are standout choices for younger groups (five–eight years).

In the Egg Protector activity, children must create a protective structure for an egg and then subject it to tests to ensure it can withstand impact. This task encourages critical thinking, creativity, and even engineering skills.

Orienteering and Giant Cluedo also develop map reading, navigation, and logical reasoning skills. These activities provide a stimulating environment for children to practice real-world problem-solving in a fun and engaging way. **TP**



Duncan Kemp is general manager for JCA – a leading provider of

activity residential trips for schools that curate nurturing environments to enhance the physical, social, and emotional growth of primary school children.

 jca-adventure.co.uk

SCHOOL TRIPS 

Paultons Park

Hampshire theme park with a dedicated interactive education facility



AT A GLANCE

- Over 70 rides and attractions with minimal queuing times
- Curriculum-based workshops for just £1.50 per pupil
- Stunning surroundings with opportunities to meet birds and animals
- Affordable rates starting at £11.50 per pupil



REVIEWED BY: ELAINE BENNETT

Are you searching for the perfect school trip that combines educational value with excitement? Paultons Park in Hampshire, home of Peppa Pig World, offers an unforgettable day out for primary school pupils and teachers alike. This unique destination seamlessly blends learning with fun, making it an ideal choice for your next school outing.

At Paultons Park, students can explore more than 70 rides and attractions, from gentle rides perfect for younger children to exhilarating rollercoasters that will thrill older students. There's minimal queuing time, allowing your class to enjoy a full day of adventure without the stress.

One of the park's highlights is Peppa Pig World, a magical area dedicated to the world-famous character. This enchanting section of the park offers a variety of themed rides and attractions that

younger pupils will adore, making it an excellent option for Key Stage 1 classes.

Beyond the excitement of the rides, Paultons Park is committed to providing rich educational experiences. The education team offers a range of curriculum-based workshops for just £1.50 per pupil.

A standout feature of Paultons Park is Professor Blast's Learning Lab, the UK's first dedicated interactive education facility within a

theme park. Designed specifically for school groups, this innovative space enriches the educational experience, making your trip both fun and informative.

For Key Stage 1, the Dino Discovery workshop takes students on a prehistoric journey where they can learn about dinosaurs through interactive activities. Key Stage 2 pupils can explore the forces behind rollercoasters, dive into computing with Ride Programming, or engage in the cross-curricular Theme Park Creator workshop.

It's not all about the rides either. Paultons Park is beautifully maintained, with stunning gardens to admire. You can also get up close with a range of birds and animals, including penguins, parrots, meerkats and snakes. This serene area of the park offers a great opportunity for students to learn about nature and wildlife in a relaxed environment.

Teachers will appreciate the free downloadable resources available from Paultons Park, which include essential risk assessments, social stories to prepare children for the visit, and topic planning tools.

Education rates start at just £11.50 per pupil for off-peak visits, with free adult tickets provided at a ratio of one adult per five students. Best of all, no payment is required until after your trip, making it easy to plan and budget.

“Teachers will appreciate the free downloadable resources available from Paultons Park”

teach
PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ Broad range of rides, from gentle to exhilarating
- ✓ Budget-friendly workshops for KS1 & KS2, covering science, computing and more
- ✓ Beautiful gardens with wildlife encounters
- ✓ Free resources including risk assessments, planning tools and more
- ✓ Affordable rates, starting at £11.50 per pupil, with free adult tickets

UPGRADE IF...

...you want an affordable, exciting and educational day out featuring curriculum-based workshops.

For more information visit paultonspark.co.uk

MATHS

New Group Maths Test



A maths monitoring tool that is truly personalised for students

AT A GLANCE

- Termly, holistic maths assessment for pupils aged six–12 years.
- Enables all learners to achieve through a powerful, adaptive algorithm.
- Designed to establish an accurate measure of current maths attainment.
- Identifies areas of relative strength and areas for further development.



REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Maths assessments are notoriously difficult to get right. You need them to be robust and reliable, tried and tested, and provide you with the accurate information to support your own judgements and make well-informed decisions about your pupils' skills. Maths assessments need to check for understanding, monitor learning and provide timely feedback and next steps. They also need to measure curriculum effectiveness. So where do we look?

The New Group Maths Test (NGMT) is a new digital, adaptive, termly test that measures maths attainment, pinpoints gaps in conceptual knowledge and puts meaningful information in the hands of both specialist and non-specialist teachers. This new test is a dynamic and effective way of touching base, eliciting evidence of learning on an individual and whole cohort level and is an efficient way of getting a sense of children's understanding of concepts. It is perfect for spotting children not hitting milestones, highlighting misconceptions, and recognising children with specific or more wide-ranging gaps in knowledge. It's also valuable in pinpointing children's understanding of maths vocabulary and highlighting potential concerns surrounding particular concepts.

What's different about this test? As one size does not fit all, NGMT uses adaptive testing by adjusting the difficulty of questions based on a pupil's responses, providing a personalised test experience using clear and unambiguous questions that test specific concepts and skills. As children do well, the test questions get harder and if they do less well, the content difficulty is reduced and a test outcome is decided when a child's level settles out. The test platform is clear and without

gimmicks and so looks and feels sharp and formal but still user-friendly.

The NGMT test works efficiently because it ensures that children's time is not spent answering questions that are too hard or much too easy. It is auto marked and easy to use and it therefore delivers data you can trust, in less time.

A very broad range of skills can also be tested so this is an engaging and meaningful test for all learners. If you are looking to empower pupils and quickly identify and close their knowledge gaps then this is the test for you.

You view the results of the test in a dynamic reporting platform called Testwise where you can decide how to display the data. For example, you may decide to display results in terms of gender, Year group, class, nationality, SEND, or English as an additional or second language. The NGMT test and Testwise reporting combine seamlessly and provide precise information about how a child is tracking and achieving, with data that can be explored in far greater depth. It is also a more supportive experience for each pupil.

The adaptive algorithm is an underused technology in the world of nationally standardised tests. Real benefits include a more engaging test experience that produces a detailed and accurate picture of maths attainment enabling teachers to more precisely identify needs and target teaching where it is needed most. NGMT is a maths monitoring tool that is truly personalised for children and their capabilities. It is a highly workable, desirable and effective assessment solution. By utilising pupils' zone of proximal development and adjusting to each pupil's answers, the test can support learning effectively through 'just-right-for-me' learning opportunities.

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PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ High-quality questions for the enhancement of learning
- ✓ Provides a valid and reliable picture of maths attainment
- ✓ Provides inclusive content for all learners
- ✓ Gives a holistic view of learners' strengths and improvement areas
- ✓ Facilitates responsive teaching and a pedagogy of engagement
- ✓ Helps teachers focus on what matters to bolster maths

UPGRADE IF...

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AT A GLANCE

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- A traditional retelling with a modern twist
- Teacher's book
- Audio CD
- Available with Words on Screen™ eSongbook

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



Nothing says 'Christmas is here' quite like a school nativity. You also know the festive period is approaching when you see the 'rabbit in headlights' look of the staff charged with staging the nativity...

Writing and producing an engaging, relevant and contemporary version of the nativity and the birth of Jesus Christ is a huge responsibility and no easy task. Well, not unless you are part of the Out of the Ark stable of talent that is, as they have got nativity productions down to a fine art.

They are so good at creating a polished and professional production with original writing, marvellous music and scintillating songs, there is simply no reason to hit the panic button, go all DIY and frantically cobble a production together single-handedly. Out of the Ark have a stable full of nativities ready to stage, so it's easy-peasy, nativity squeezey.

Their latest offering, Simply the Nativity, combines comic elements, puns and some bad jokes with the traditional story of Christmas through a clever script fit for a king. The theme is a familiar one, and this version is a lively, fast-moving and original retelling.

There's a fabulous teacher's book that contains the script, ideas for rehearsing, costumes, staging and props along with the music score and song lyric sheets for eight songs (piano music score, melody and chords). An editable script is available if you buy a package that includes an eSongbook.

If you aren't musical, fear not – the resource comes with an audio CD with all the vocal tracks superbly sung by children, there are professional backing tracks and transition tracks too. You can also purchase rehearsal CDs and these are available in packs of five, ten or 20.

How will you teach the songs? Easy, there's a Words on Screen™ version of songs so that you can show the song lyrics on a whiteboard, computer screen, TV or interactive touchscreen.

All you have to do is press play and the words synchronise with the music, so it really is user-friendly and simple to implement.

Punctuating the script are eight exciting songs that fizz with fun and thoughtfulness. These include a finger-clicking travelling song with a leg-kicking can-can, a reflective ballad, a cheeky song with suggested dance choreography, a high-energy bells and whistle number and something more low-key and worshipful.

The songs are all top-notch canticles with a modern twist and enable children to encapsulate and express the joy, devotion and awe-inspiring scenes of the nativity as well as have lots of fun in an appropriately uplifting and celebratory style. There is plenty of encore material here!

There are speaking parts for 30 children and some essential non-speaking parts too, so participation for all guaranteed. Parts can be edited according to how many children will be in your production, so don't worry, you won't have to borrow some children from another year group! A recorded version of the script is available on a CD and in an eSongbook for enjoyment and rehearsal.

The school nativity is a religious, cultural and community 'box office' event that gives children the opportunity to really experience and get to know the story of the first Christmas. Simply the Nativity cleverly weaves this story into a contemporary context and helps children to understand that Christmas is not all about material presents but the present of life.

At the heart of this resource you'll find inspiration, innovation, collaboration, respect and inclusion.

Out of the Ark understand that nativities are about communities and bringing people together, and this musical will certainly do just that.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✓ An easy-going retelling of the nativity story
- ✓ A nativity for all children to excel
- ✓ Spreads happiness, warmth and fun
- ✓ Promotes joyful celebration
- ✓ Allows children to explore effective communication and performance
- ✓ Enhances learning, engagement and wellbeing

UPGRADE IF...

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Q & A

We take the famous Proust questionnaire and pose eight of its questions to a fellow educator. Take a peek into the deepest depths of a teacher's soul...

1 What is your idea of perfect happiness in your job?

Taking a step back for a moment and observing my classroom buzzing with the cheerful hum of engaged and happy children, each tackling tasks in their own unique and imaginative ways. It feels like a wonderful celebration of individuality. Watching your pupils' excitement and creativity unfold and their confidence bloom in their learning is truly what makes teaching so rewarding.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

Somehow losing track of a child! No matter how carefully I count heads, or come up with clever ways to keep track of them all, there is always one child who's crept under the table playing hide and seek. Meanwhile, someone else has moved to the back of the line without anyone realising, or has been dancing in the bathroom for ten minutes, blissfully unaware the rest of the class are on their way to assembly.

3 What is your current state of mind?

I'm in a state of hopeful anticipation as the new school year begins. I'm excited to see how things will unfold, and curious about how the children will grow, change and surprise us in new ways. I'm also wondering what memories we might create together and what experiences might occur that will shape our journey throughout the year.

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

The idea of 'always having to get it done.' Sometimes – well, often – despite our best intentions, things don't go as planned. And that's perfectly fine. There can often be a lot of pressure to meet every goal and complete every task, but I think it's important to remember that there will be days when neither the teacher nor the children will be able to 'get things done' as intended. However, this does not mean that learning or, more importantly, happy learning hasn't taken place. Sometimes, the most valuable experiences come from those unplanned moments.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

I once told my class that the electricity wasn't working one day. In a world overflowing with technological distractions, it seemed like a great excuse for a break. I told the children that we needed to generate our own power through creativity and reading lots of books. I promised the class that our interactive whiteboard and tablets would magically start working again the next day if we did so.

“Sometimes, the most valuable experiences come from unplanned moments”

6 Which words or phrases do you most overuse with your class?

I might just have a few go-to phrases that I overuse with my children, like “123, look at me”, “Criss-cross, apple sauce”, “Hands on top, that means stop” and, my favourite, “Let's make our brains grow!”. Sometimes, the phrases get a little mixed up and make very little sense, but somehow they still do the job...

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

I think my greatest achievement has been learning how to build strong relationships with my children. Over my teaching career, I've learnt that this is the most important thing. Getting to know the children and creating trustful connections allows them to feel safe, secure and comfortable, and this is what sets the stage for all learning to truly take off.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

Mr. Flamingo – a small, pink and fluffy toy. He is loved by pupils of all ages, from Reception to Year 6, and often takes on the role of 'Teacher number 2'. Funnily enough, even though Mr Flamingo is a silent observer, sometimes, he seems to have more authority than I do!



NAME: Sophie Kalinauckas
JOB ROLE: Primary school teacher

“Without a doubt it has given my students the confidence to enjoy maths. All 4 of the children I work with 3 times a week said they ‘hate maths’ when they were asked a year ago. Now, a year on they cannot wait for their sessions.”

~ Sally Andrew, Teaching Assistant,
Ladygrove Park Primary

Maths For Life is different. It helps both educators and students to get the results they deserve.

The Maths For Life programme is designed for schools, colleges and home educators. It provides a differentiated approach to the maths curriculum that lays down solid foundations, is framed in practical understanding, and delivers the essential maths needed for life.

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...ENGAGES STUDENTS

...BUILDS CONFIDENCE

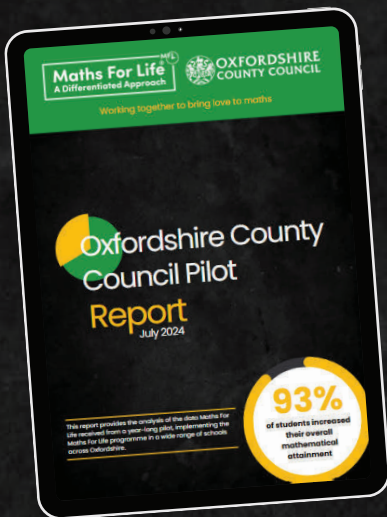
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Our pilot report contains compelling evidence of how the Maths For Life programme can benefit your students, staff and school. It details the positive impact not only on maths attainment, but also in the wider context, including independence, self-esteem and reading. Read our full report or find out more about our programme by visiting our website.



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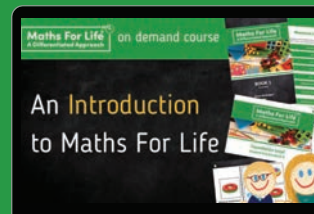
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