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Hello!

And we're back! I hope you all had exactly the summer break you needed.

Our special section this issue is on assessment: Adele Darlington discusses ways to track pupil progress in art without stifling creativity (p60), while Marc Bowen explains his favourite approach to whole-class assessment (p53).

In leadership matters (p45), we're focusing on the, sadly widespread, issue of pupil poverty. Three experienced education leaders offer both tried-and-tested solutions at school level, and suggestions for national policy changes. We also have advice from Hannah Mansell on how you can encourage pupils to think beyond barriers of socioeconomics and gender to reach for their dreams (p11).

On p45, Hannah Shaw has put together a six-week unit on healthy eating, with the aim of empowering children to make good food choices in a time of widespread childhood obesity.

In more lighthearted things, we've got lesson plans on comedy (p86), singing (p90) and using drama to generate creative writing ideas (p88). Plus Laura Di Pasquale has some fun ideas for ways to incorporate coding robots across the curriculum (p30). Children will also enjoy Aidan Severs' maths activities, on page 40, which are all about money.

Literacy-wise, Pie Corbett shares findings from the very successful Punctuation Project (p72), and Laura Dobson demonstrates effective ways to teach compound sentences (p67). On page 75 we have a KS1 book topic based on Nadia Shireen's charming *The Bumblebear*, while our expert WAGOLL (p70), on crafting an awkward scene, comes from Emma Carroll – bestselling author of *Letters from the Lighthouse* and *Escape to the River Sea*.

Wishing you all good things this term – and if you'd like to write an article for *Teach Primary*, just drop me an email.

Lydia

Lydia Grove, editor
@TeachPrimaryLG

Don't miss our next issue, available from 27th September

POWERED BY...

FRANK COTTRELL-BOYCE lays out his vision as Children's Laureate

"Getting people to share what they do well will be wonderful"
P13

MARK MARTIN examines the benefits of collaborative learning

"The challenge is ensuring every voice, whether loud or soft, finds its space"
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LAURA DOBSON breaks down compound sentences

"Use the mnemonic 'FANBOYS' to remember the coordinating conjunctions"
P67

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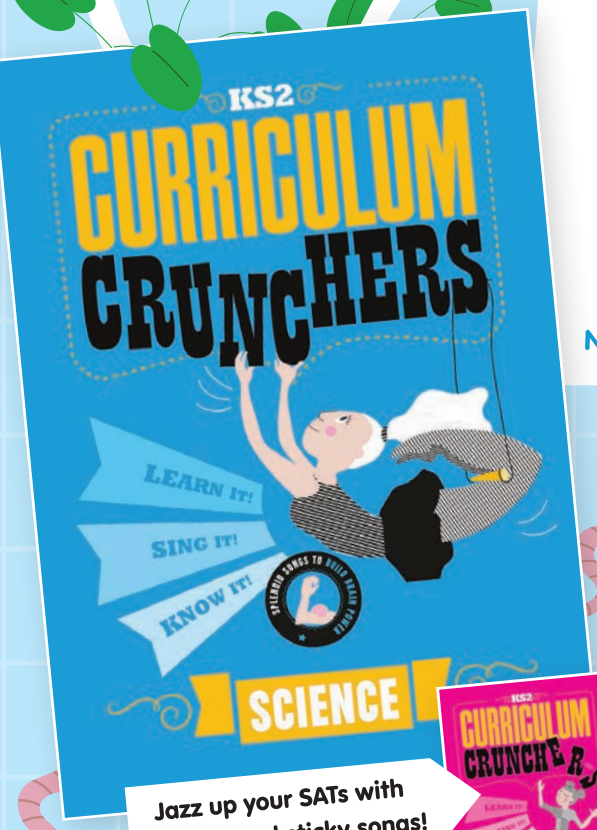

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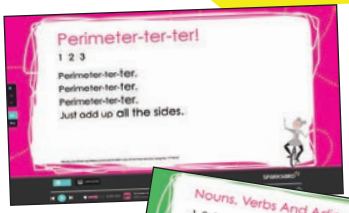

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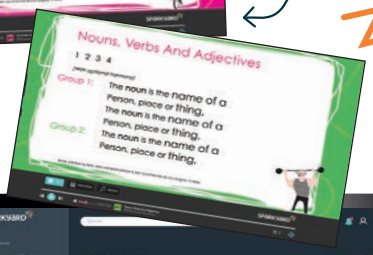

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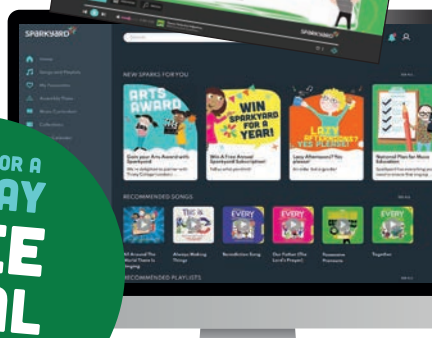

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ISSUE 18.6

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VOICES

SPECIAL SECTION

ASSESSMENT SPECIAL

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!

PUBLISHERS:
Joe Carter
Sam Reubin
Richard Stebbing

EDITOR:
Lydia Grove,
lydia.grove@artichokehq.com

GROUP ADVERTISING MANAGER:
Samantha Law,
samantha.law@artichokehq.com
01206 505499

SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER:
Demi Maynard,
demi.maynard@artichokehq.com
01206 505962

ACCOUNT MANAGER:
Kim Richards,
kim.richards@artichokehq.com
01206 505420

ART EDITORS:
Richard Allen & Sarah Barajas

ACCOUNTS:
artichokemedialtd@integral2.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS:
subscriptions@artichokeHQ.com

PUBLISHED BY:
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FEATURES

LESSON PLANS

Teach Reading & Writing
BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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SEPTEMBER

Breaktime

News | Interviews | Ideas | Resources | Research

Season's bleatings

Shaun the Sheep has been announced as Save the Children's new Head of Wool! He is colla-baa-rating with the charity to make the world better with a sweater – and wants children across the UK to join the flock. Shaun will be encouraging schools and youth groups up and down the country to take part in Christmas Jumper Day on Thursday 12 December.

Children don't have to buy a new jumper to take part – it's much more fun to decorate an old jumper, after all. Or they could pick up a tree-mendous pre-loved festive jumper from a Save the Children shop.

Visit **ChristmasJumperDay.org** to receive a free fundraising pack with lesson plans, festive activities and all the information you need to plan the merriest day ever.

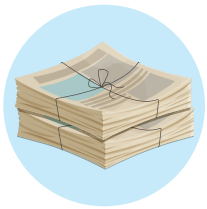
3 INSTANT LESSONS...
(You're welcome)

DISCUSSING RACE

In light of the recent unrest in the UK, Save the Children have put together 12 tips to help you talk with children about race, belonging and how current events might be worrying or impacting them and their peers. Find out more at **tinyurl.com/tp-STC-Racism**

KS2 WRITING ADVICE

One of the areas of creative fiction writing that children consistently fail to incorporate into their work is the technique of building suspense. Show pupils how to ramp up the tension and craft suspenseful narratives with this selection of lesson and activity ideas. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-Suspense**



TOPICAL TUESDAYS

Unlock the power of news-based learning with free, weekly resources based on stories from First News. Designed to get children thinking, talking and writing about what really matters to them, all the activities are created by experienced teachers. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-TopicalTuesdays**

TODAY'S TOP RESOURCES

Handwriting practice sheets

Do your learners need to practise forming letters correctly? Are you looking for ways to ensure they develop fully legible handwriting? This resource pack provides simple and attractive pre-cursive and print handwriting worksheets; a set for each letter of the alphabet, using a pre-cursive font. Take a look at **bit.ly/PlazoomPreCursive**

CLiPPA celebrations at Southbank

A former primary teacher has won this year's CLPE Children's Poetry Award. Matt Goodfellow, who is one of the most exciting and popular new voices in children's poetry, lifted the trophy for his verse novel, *The Final Year*.

As well as celebrating outstanding poetry, the CLiPPA encourages schools to explore the award shortlist with their pupils through its Shadowing Scheme – each year prompting poetry performances by thousands of children in hundreds of classrooms across the UK. Children from Birmingham, Brent, Wandsworth, Birkenhead and Caterham, winners in the CLiPPA Shadowing Scheme, also performed live at the award ceremony, which took place at the National Theatre in July. You can browse all the shortlisted books at **clpe.org.uk/poetry/CLiPPA**

Teach Awards 2024

The shortlisted resources have now been revealed for this year's Teach Awards. With a multitude of providers offering diverse resource options, sifting through and discovering the finest choices can be a time-consuming endeavour for busy teachers. That's where the Teach Awards come in.

Companies and organisations submit their educational resources for evaluation by a panel of expert judges, aiming to pinpoint the ones most deserving of schools' time and attention. The awards span 23 categories across early years, primary and secondary. Entries are judged on a range of criteria that include impact, value for money, originality and ease of use. You can browse this year's shortlist, and find out about previous winners, at **teachwire.net/news/teach-awards**

29% of pupils are classified as disadvantaged by the end of primary school

*epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/annual-report-2024

Look ahead | Book ahead

AHOY, ME HEARTIES!

It's Talk Like a Pirate Day on 19 September. We've rounded up some great nautical lesson ideas and activities that you can use to celebrate the day with your class. Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-Pirates**

PLAN YOUR NEXT SCHOOL TRIP

Looking for an affordable but educational outing for your class or year group? We're here to help with our School Trip Finder! Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-Trips**

Q & A

Luan Goldie

Women's Prize longlisted author and Costa Award Winning short story writer

1. What was primary school like for you?

I have a terrible memory and after a decade working as a primary school teacher, all my memories seem to merge into one. But I loved school as it was filled with all my favourite things: friends and books and messy crafts, and being able to sing 'Cauliflowers fluffy and cabbages green' at the top of my voice in assembly.

***2. What inspired you to write your middle-grade book,* Skylar and the K-pop Headteacher?**

I'm a huge fangirl. Whether it's boybands, 90s rappers or K-pop, I just love the music and everything which goes along with being part of these cultures. I'm also very aware of how ridiculed being a fangirl or fanboy often is, so wanted to write something which celebrated it and tapped into just how fun and joyful it is to love something beyond common sense.

3. In what ways does your previous career as a teacher influence your writing?

For years, I saw what children read for pleasure, what they laughed at and what they couldn't put down despite me telling them a hundred times to please put your books away now

***Skylar and the K-pop Headteacher,* by Luan Goldie, is available now (£7.99, Walker Books).**

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8 WAYS to inspire learners

By instilling a sense of possibility and ambition, we can help every child to dream big

1 | CLASSROOM CULTURE

By cultivating a safe space to explore, make mistakes, receive support, and celebrate achievements, we can strengthen self-belief. When this is combined with explicit teaching and learning about growth mindset, pupils will learn to view challenges as opportunities. Emphasising effort over talent demonstrates that hard work leads to improvement. Pearson's recent School Report (**tinyurl.com/tp-Pearson24**) highlights that seven in ten learners feel their future options are limited by their current academic performance; this emphasises the need for building confidence, resilience and self-efficacy.

2 | THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Use empowering language to reframe pupils as 'experts'. So, instead of saying, "We're doing science," try, "As scientists, we're going to explore…" This subtle but transformative shift helps pupils see themselves as professionals, boosting confidence and ambition. By envisioning themselves as authors, engineers or artists, children learn their current academic attainment does not define their future; with effort and persistence, they can excel and broaden their sense of future possibilities.

3 | CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS

Recognising and celebrating pupils' achievements, big or small, can boost confidence and motivation. By celebrating successes, we can reinforce the belief that effort leads to progress, creating a positive environment where students feel valued and motivated to set and pursue ambitious future goals.

4 | MEANING MATTERS

Research by the DfE highlights the importance of early career-related learning to broaden horizons. Incorporating regular and varied career-focused activities will initiate important conversations and provide essential real-world experiences, and help demonstrate why a subject is important. So, try structuring maths lessons around budgeting for a school event, or measuring ingredients for a recipe. And perhaps plan some art classes that involve designing promotional posters – linking to careers in graphic design.

HANNAH MANSELL
is a primary school teacher of 12 years.

5 | PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Career carousels, where volunteers such as parents or other members or the community speak with groups of children about their jobs, can be highly effective and may enable children to visualise themselves in similar roles. These opportunities not only provide pupils with a broader understanding of various career paths, but also help to demystify professions that they might not have previously considered.

6 | ADDRESSING STEREOTYPES

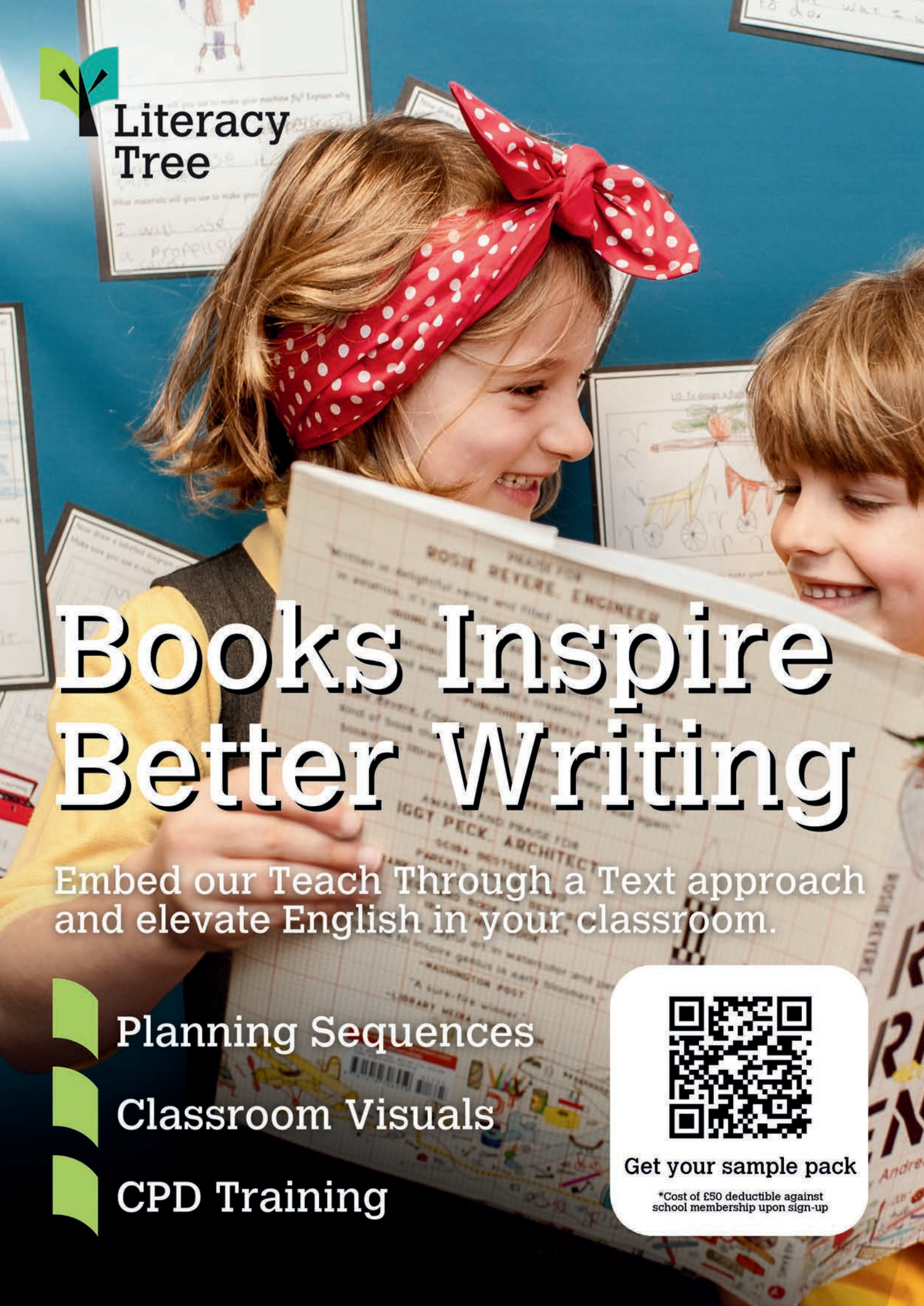
Research by Gottfredson in 2001 indicated that children as young as six begin to see jobs and future pathways as intrinsically gendered. Sadly, 20 years on, this is often still the case. In Pearson's School Report, two-thirds of primary learners said they 'learn better when I see people like me/from my background'. So, there is a clear need for us to ensure that pupils are made aware of female engineers, male nurses, etc., as well as successful people from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

7 | INSPIRATIONAL SUCCESS

Sharing inspiring stories of people who have overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams can be very motivating. Talking about the ups and downs of different careers and emphasising the importance of resilience can help children aim high and believe in their potential. Highlighting that success comes in many forms can help pupils understand that they too can achieve greatness, no matter their starting point.

8 | BUILDING BLOCKS TO BRILLIANCE

Aiming high often means starting in one place and progressing to another. Discussing with children how people often begin their studies and careers in one area and then move to another will help them understand how skills are transferable. Encouraging pupils to see every opportunity as a building block demonstrates that effort is never wasted, and that their journey will be full of meaningful learning moments.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"Getting people to share what they do well will be wonderful"

New Children's Laureate **Frank Cottrell-Boyce** lays out his vision

©David Bebber

TP It's been a little while since you were announced as Children's Laureate. Has anything surprised you about the role?

FC-B Everyone thinks it's the Poet Laureate! Nobody can say 'laureate', without putting 'poet' in front of it. Even those who remember it's about children say Children's Poet Laureate. People ask, "Have you got to write a poem?"

Another thing is that everyone thinks of it as an accolade, but I'm very much treating it as a job.

TP You've said you want to focus on tackling invisible privilege. What challenges do you think that will entail?

FC-B I see a lot of really good practice; I've seen amazing stuff in primary. It's just making sure that everyone gets to know about it and shares it. And I think for that to happen, we do need some kind of government intervention for it not to be patchy. Sometimes, in the same day, I'll go to a school that has incredible practice around reading and then I'll literally be able to walk to the next school and it'll be dead. I just think, how is this happening? It shouldn't be. It shouldn't be a lottery.

I think I will need some kind of political backup. If I get that, I think that collating good practice will be a joy. And getting people to share what they do well will be wonderful.

TP You're also launching a Reading Rights campaign with Booktrust, who are the UK's largest children's reading charity, and who run the Laureateship. What are you hoping to achieve from that?

FC-B We know what an enormous advantage it is to have a good experience with books before you start school. So, given that we know how important and huge the effect of access to books is, I think every child has a right to benefit from it. If it's just not happening, we should find a way to make it happen.

TP Have you had people reach out to you already regarding these projects?

FC-B People started contacting me straight away, which I didn't expect. It feels huge. People in publishing have asked if they can help; some celebrities too.

Lots of organisations, such as Coram and Beanstalk, asked to meet and share with me what they're doing. So, yeah, I think there's a sense there that it needs to be done.

TP Did you take any advice from Joseph [Coelho, previous Children's Laureate] when he passed the baton to you?

FC-B Yeah. Joseph's big tip was "Book your holidays now." Which, of course, I haven't done. And when I spoke to him, I realised that he hadn't done it either: he was describing the rocks on which he perished, rather than the wisdom that he'd exercised.

TP Is there anything you'd like to say to *Teach Primary* readers?

FC-B If you've got great practice in your primary, do, do, do reach out to me! I want to know about it. I'm going to collect good practice, and I've already seen some amazing things.

I want this to be a good-news thing. I'm optimistic about it, because you can't afford not to be. I feel that this is doable. There's a great quote from William Beveridge, 'Scratch a pessimist and you find often a defender of privilege.'

Another thing is that writers have got very hung up on the idea of libraries over the years. Libraries are really important and wonderful, but they're not the only weapon, you know? There are people who are managing without libraries, or finding new ways to use or curate their libraries. I've seen libraries that have opened that look lovely, but they're not properly curated, and kids don't have agency about how to use them. So, I don't want schools having a whip-round, building a lovely library and then doing nothing with it – which I have seen happen. I want to hear about good practice, you know? **TP**

Frank Cottrell-Boyce is the Waterstones Children's Laureate for 2024–26. A multi award-winning children's book author and screenwriter, his debut children's novel,* Millions*, won the prestigious CILIP Carnegie Medal

@frankcottrell_b

@UKLaureate

booktrust.org.uk/childrens-laureate

The widening enrichment gap must go

We need to prioritise arts and cultural education at primary level, says **David Wearing**

In the current educational climate, primary schools face immense pressure to meet academic targets, which often leads to the unfortunate sidelining of arts and cultural education. The Cultural Learning Alliance's annual Report Card 2024 revealed the profound impact this de-prioritisation has had over the past decade – the effects of which are particularly pronounced in schools serving disadvantaged communities **(tinyurl.com/tp-ReportCard)**.

Why the gap matters

The 'enrichment gap' refers to the disparity in access to arts and cultural experiences between children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

This divide has far-reaching implications. Children who lack exposure to the arts miss out on critical opportunities for creative expression, cultural awareness, and emotional development. They are also deprived of the numerous cognitive benefits associated with arts education, such as improved critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and academic performance. Notably, expressive arts education is often prioritised in the independent school sector, further widening the gap between different socio-economic groups.

The data drought

There's also an evidence gap. It's particularly difficult to understand the state of arts education in primary schools, as they don't have the qualifications data that is available for the secondary sector. What our sector needs is clear figures on the number of arts specialists in primary schools, and how many hours are spent on each national curriculum area.

Alongside policymakers and civil servants, schools also have a role in addressing the existing cultural deficit. They're not just places of academic learning; they are also spaces where children develop holistically, gaining skills and experiences that shape their future. By integrating arts and cultural education into the curriculum, schools can play a pivotal role in levelling inequalities, ensuring that all children, regardless of background, have access to essential enriching experiences.

An arts-rich education supports children's health and wellbeing and promotes the development of essential skills for work and life. The expressive arts can inject awe and wonder into curriculums, fostering curiosity and a love for learning that extends beyond the classroom. Partnerships with artists and cultural organisations introduce children to diverse creative role-models, raising aspirations, opening minds and helping children from all backgrounds to flourish.

Arts-confident schools

Despite current accountability measures that often work against arts subjects, some schools continue to value and prioritise the arts as essential to a broad and balanced curriculum. In fact, there are numerous examples of primary and secondary schools across England that offer robust arts education. These 'arts-confident' schools often become 'arts-rich' – achieving high performance across all areas. Confident decision-making is a key factor, so it is vital for school and MAT leaders to truly believe in the value of the arts and their impact on fostering a high-functioning learning environment.

By prioritising the expressive arts, school leaders can help close the enrichment gap, foster creativity, and ensure that all children receive the well-rounded education they deserve.

Politicians, education policymakers, and sector leaders must work together to establish and adhere to a clear set of educational purposes that encompass the arts. As primary educators, it is our responsibility to champion this cause for the benefit of our pupils, and the future of our society. So, the time to act is now—let's ensure that every child has access to the transformational power of arts and culture. You can get started by signing up to the CLA at **culturallearningalliance.org.uk** to lend your weight to its work and receive all the latest arts education news. **TP**

David is headteacher at The Oaks Primary School, Ellesmere Port and a trustee and SLiCE (specialist leader of education) at cultural education charity, Curious Minds. He was named Headteacher of the Year at the 2019 Cheshire Schools Awards.

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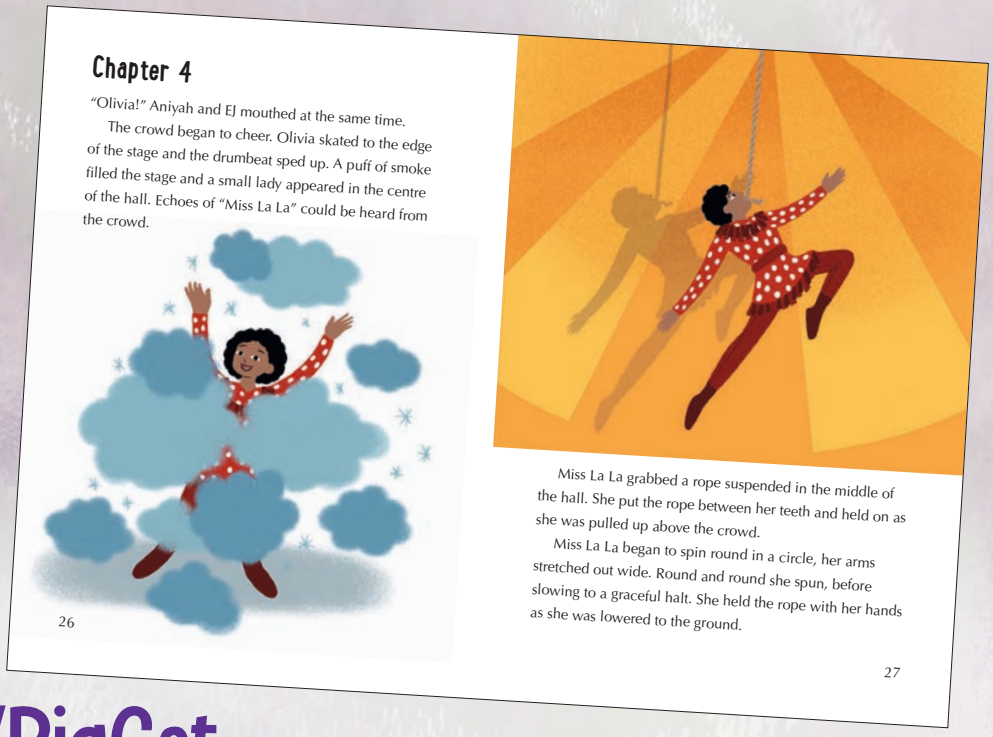

Chapter 4

"Olivia!" Aniyah and EJ mouthed at the same time.

The crowd began to cheer. Olivia skated to the edge of the stage and the drumbeat sped up. A puff of smoke filled the stage and a small lady appeared in the centre of the hall. Echoes of "Miss La La" could be heard from the crowd.

26

Miss La La grabbed a rope suspended in the middle of the hall. She put the rope between her teeth and held on as she was pulled up above the crowd.

Miss La La began to spin round in a circle, her arms stretched out wide. Round and round she spun, before slowing to a graceful halt. She held the rope with her hands as she was lowered to the ground.

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Find out more at

collins.co.uk/BigCat

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

A letter to...
All teachers

It's never too early to teach children to check their sources, says *First News* editor **Nicky Cox MBE**

I'll let you into a secret. As founding editor-in-chief of the UK's first and only weekly newspaper for children, you might expect me to be a champion of giving young people the facts; and, of course, I am. But here's the thing: 18 years after we launched *First News*, I'm seriously starting to wonder whether that's enough. Because I'll be honest – the sheer volume of information, unchecked and unfiltered, that children are now bombarded with on a daily basis is terrifying to me.

Children are introduced to smartphones at an increasingly young age, exposed to powerful algorithms serving up content designed to grab users' attention and encourage sharing. The line between what is fun and edgy, and what is harmful and dangerous is blurred. It's a distinction that can be difficult even for adults to perceive, let alone primary-aged pupils, who are often still just as happy playing 'dog families' in the playground as they are logging into Minecraft or Roblox when they get home.

As far back as 2018, the UK's Commission on Fake News and Critical Literacy in Schools found that only two per cent of children and young people had the critical literacy skills they needed to judge whether a news story is real or false. A majority (60 per cent) of teachers surveyed believed fake news was having a harmful effect on children's wellbeing by increasing anxiety, damaging self-esteem and skewing their world view. And from what our readers tell us, not to mention what we experience as media consumers ourselves, navigating this volatile landscape is only getting more challenging. When politicians are presenting TV shows and social media influencers are pushing policy agendas – how are children supposed to know which news source to trust?

Literacy is rightly championed, along with numeracy, as a priority for our education system; but what about critical literacy? I believe that equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed to separate a trusted source from a dubious one, identifying bias and agendas, and triangulating data to create as accurate a picture as possible, should be woven into any curriculum designed to do more than simply enable pupils to jump through assessment hoops – and from as early an age as possible.

> *"The sheer volume of information, unchecked and unfiltered, that children are now bombarded with on a daily basis is terrifying"*

The good news, which will come as no surprise to you at the chalkface, is that the skills required for critical literacy are already being developed in classrooms everywhere. Right from the first time they tackle a multiple-choice question with deliberately plausible wrong answers, through 'guesstimating' the solution before using a calculator and 'thinking like a scientist/historian/geographer' – pupils are taught, over and over, to *check their work*. I wonder, though, whether this aspect of teaching should be made even more explicit; perhaps even somehow worked into accountability measures. If a school really is 'good', or even 'outstanding', shouldn't its pupils leave with a healthy level of scepticism towards things they are being asked to accept and believe?

I'm not suggesting there should be endless debate around every single name, date or mathematical concept presented for children to learn (although my most memorable lesson ever was when our brilliant Year 6 maths teacher cut a paper circle into segments, then rearranged them in a rough oblong, by way of proving Pythagoras' theorem to us – so much more powerful than just committing the formulae to memory). But I would urge you, as consistently as possible, to encourage pupils to reinforce their learning independently, evidence their opinions and question their sources. Exactly what I expect, in fact, from every journalist writing for *First News*.

Knowledge may well be power, and the transfer of it is absolutely the core business of schools; but I am convinced that being able to separate the truth from an attractive or convincing falsehood is a superpower to which all our young people should be entitled, too – are you with me?

Nicky

Nicky Cox MBE is editor-in-chief of First News, *a weekly newspaper for readers aged seven to 14. To find out more about the paper, and accompanying free resources, visit tinyurl.com/TSFirstNews*

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UNDERCOVER TEACHER

Existing as a person of colour in majority-white settings

My experience as a Bangladeshi teacher in rural Norfolk has been far from smooth sailing

When I took on my first teaching role in Norfolk, I'd already spent six years as a teacher in two large multicultural primary schools in London. Armed with all the experience I had gained as both a teacher and middle manager, I was convinced I could handle any challenge thrown at me. I soon realised how naive I had been.

I'd applied to schools in Norwich, feeling confident that I would be appointed in a city school, and was surprised to secure a position in a one-form entry village school. The headteacher had made a bold decision to appoint me, as the school population was all white. She was someone whom I consider outward-looking, and who wanted what she called 'fresh thinking' in her school. Despite this, she was very aware of how parents might react, and invited them to a 'meet the teacher' event. It was clear to me, as the only teacher who was asked to do this before the new academic year, that being an experienced teacher wasn't going to be enough.

"I soon realised how naive I had been"

Over time, I've come to understand the huge worries headteachers in small rural settings face each year as birth rates fluctuate. Keeping parents 'on side', to avoid falling pupil numbers, is important. This tension once led a senior leader to instruct me to not 'play the race card'; they promptly halted a conversation about negative comments being made about me by a small group of parents, in case they removed their children from the school.

Adults, rather than children, tend to be the group most set in their ways when faced with someone who doesn't fit the norm of what a 'Norfolk teacher' is expected to look like. Unfortunately, this also applies to those working in the education system. These are the people supposedly leading the way with inclusion and equal opportunities; the very ideas that ensure every child has fair and equitable access to education.

In the 18 years I have been teaching in Norfolk, not once has a visiting professional approached me as the class teacher to speak to me about children they were supporting. It's a teaching assistant, a volunteer or even a fresh-faced student teacher who is the first person the speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, PGCE student mentor or any other visitor to my classroom seeks out.

It's clear that there is still a presumption in Norfolk that the lead professional in the room could not be the non-white person. One of the main reasons behind this could be the lack of diversity in the teaching workforce in Norfolk. This is part of a wider issue. A recent study from the University of Warwick (2023) reported that 55 per cent of schools have no ethnic minority teacher.

Despite many negative and often uncomfortable interactions I've had with adults over the years, there have been many positive experiences and, unsurprisingly, nearly all have been while teaching. Children are open and inquisitive, and do not hesitate to ask where you are from and which languages you speak. I quickly learned to share my background with every class I teach. I've often been delighted with their interest when they independently find Bangladesh in an atlas during a reading session, or arrive at school to tell me they have found out the name of its capital city. They've also enjoyed listening to old Bangladeshi proverbs, told in Bangla.

I like to think I have introduced a different perspective, exposing children to a level of cultural diversity and also increasing their understanding of wider societal problems. For example, I have talked about the problem of flooding caused by deforestation where I lived in Bangladesh, and the disparity between girls' and boys' schooling back home. I have even applied mehndi decorations for Eid celebrations.

Wherever we teach, developing our pupils' understanding and awareness of different cultures, languages and races is important. Increasing their ability to empathise with those who may have different backgrounds or experiences from themselves will help challenge biases and stereotypes. One of the ways we can address this is by aiming to have a teaching profession that is representative of wider society in all schools… even in rural Norfolk. TP

The author is a teacher in England.

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A new SPIN

Bring geography to life with innovative recording ideas, says **Claire Watson**

To 'inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people,' as stated in the national curriculum, we need to provide children with opportunities to be curious. Pupils should be able to speculate and hypothesise, to identify issues, ask questions and research.

Use an enquiry-based approach

Before you begin teaching a topic, develop an enquiry question that can act as the lead question for an entire unit or project. This will give purpose and focus for the lessons to come; each lesson is a step toward answering the overarching question.

Possible questions might be: *Why do people live near volcanoes? Why are some places more at risk of earthquakes than others? Where is the best place for a friendship bench in our school?*

The following ideas for recording learning all foster creativity, collaboration and geographical skills, and may help to support children with barriers to learning.

Bring maps to life

If you're studying the local area, ask pupils to create their own maps, detailing the places that are important to them. They could create symbols for important places or create a tour guide map of their town from a child's perspective. Help pupils make sound recordings of different areas and plot them on maps. Encourage the children to colour-code shops on a map of the local high street, and to create questionnaires for their families or local residents on the possible uses for empty shop units.

Be the tour guide

When learning about places, children can become the tour guides, recording audio to use with photos in a presentation, creating podcasts and creating a city guide for children. Children whose literacy skills are more developed could write a pamphlet or leaflet about an issue in an area.

Create a campaign

When learning about an issue such as the impact of deforestation on Brazil, ask pupils to create a campaign educating others about what they have learned. This could involve writing letters to politicians, creating posters or making a blog or vlog post.

Make connections

Using the technique of hot seating can be a creative way to ascertain what children have remembered about what a place may be like. Mind maps can also be a useful way to connect learning about a place with a process; for example, how rivers are formed and what it might be like to live near the Amazon River. If the mind map contains some possible subheadings, this can help scaffold the task.

Take it further

You can pick and choose other recording methods to suit the topic you're teaching. For example:

- Ask children to organise the things they've learned into 'onion circles', where an issue is written in the centre of two (or more) concentric rings. The short-term causes of the issue are then recorded in the first ring, and the long-term causes in the outer one.
- Make a consequence line, where children can position either themselves or cards to show the most to least severe consequences of an issue.
- 'Think, pair, share' can work well orally, and could be extended to videoing or creating audio recordings of the children's thoughts.
- Create weather reports to present to the class using weather symbols and maps. These could also be recorded.
- Create concept cartoons.
- Add explanatory text to presentation photographs.
- Have the children work as a team or class to create a large guidebook or explanation text.
- Draw collaborative maps of places you've studied
- Design a fact-based board game as a group about geographical concepts or places.
- Make a presentation for an audience detailing your geographical findings.

Why it works

When children are participating in describing, explaining, comparing, contrasting, analysing and reaching conclusions, they are behaving like geographers. Having an enquiry-based approach to learning can foster and develop these geographical skills. Where possible, we want children to be engaged with their learning; thinking, discussing and making meaning for themselves. This is the key to deeper learning that is embedded, connected and remembered. TP

Claire Watson is HFL Education's primary curriculum adviser for humanities. For more information about HFL training and resources to help you develop your geography curriculum and subject knowledge, visit hub.hfleducation.org

MEDIUM TERM PLAN

KS2
PSHE

EATING WELL

HANNAH SHAW

In the UK, we are in the midst of a childhood obesity epidemic. With the shocking statistic that one in three children are leaving primary school overweight, and one in five children are living with obesity, there has never been a more critical time to tackle our pupils' health and wellbeing. This six-week plan introduces pupils to key healthy eating messages, which will inform and empower them to take control over their wellbeing, to enable them to live healthier lives. Using the Eatwell Guide as a starting point, children will learn about the different food groups. They'll go on to discuss why some foods must be consumed in moderation, how to judge portion sizes, and why it's important to drink plenty of water every day.

WEEK 1

Learning objective

- To be able to explain what the Eatwell Guide is and how can it help us to eat more healthily; to be able to place foods in the correct food group on the Eatwell Guide.

Show **Slide 3**, which introduces the Eatwell Guide, and explain what the model shows. Highlight the different food groups and explain their nutritional benefits using **Slide 4**.

Ask for suggestions of foods that fit in each group and explain that we need to eat more of some foods, such fruit and vegetables from the green section and carbohydrates from the yellow section, than we do foods from other groups. This is because our bodies need different amounts of different foods to have a balanced diet and stay healthy.

Show **Slide 5** and highlight the foods outside of the Eatwell Guide (e.g. crisps, cakes and sweets). These are high in fat, salt and sugar and are foods our bodies don't need to be healthy. Explain that it is fine to eat them occasionally, but less often and in smaller quantities.

Using hoops with food group name labels, work as a class to place a range of different foods in the correct groups, whilst discussing their nutritional qualities.

To consolidate this learning, play Food Group Corners. Place the five food group name labels around the hall, call out a food and the pupils must run to the food group which the item belongs to.

Next, play 'What is it?' Sit the children in a circle, play some music and pass a food-filled bag around the circle. When the music stops, the child holding the bag selects an item and describes it to the class. The other pupils need to guess what the food is and then decide which food group it belongs in.

Assessment

Using **Week 1 resource** can the pupils write the name or draw a picture of foods that belong in each food group? Can they also explain what the Eatwell Guide shows and how we can use it to make healthy choices?

WEEK 2

Learning objective

- To understand the phrase '5-a-day' and consider different ways to reach their own 5-a-day goal.

Discover if anyone knows what '5-a-day' means and then display **Slide 7** to explain. Find out how many different fruit and vegetables the children can think of, then highlight that all the produce they have mentioned, are probably a variety of colours.

Explain the importance of 'eating a rainbow' of different coloured fruit and vegetables, because they benefit our bodies in different ways.

Provide different coloured fruit and vegetables that have been prepared in small chunks, for the pupils to arrange

in a rainbow shape before tasting them and discussing their preferences.

Display **Slide 8** and explain to the class that fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced varieties all count towards our 5-a-day.

Next, discuss portion size. Show a single grape and ask if the class think that this counts as one of our 5-a-day. Provide a range of fruit and vegetables for the class to explore and consider portion sizes.

Show **Slide 9** and talk through portion sizes and explain that the amount of food a child needs varies with their age, body size and activity levels.

Ensure that the pupils understand that only one portion (150ml) of juice or smoothie counts towards our goal, though, and should be consumed with a meal, to minimise the impact of the natural sugars on our teeth. This is the same for dried fruit. Also check that the pupils understand that potatoes do not count towards their 5-a-day, because they are classed as a starchy carbohydrate.

"One in five children are living with obesity"

In pairs, ask the pupils to discuss the different times of day when they could eat a portion of fruit or vegetables and share their ideas with the class. Look at the example on **Slide 10**.

Assessment

Using **Week 2 resource**, can the pupils record three different ways that they could achieve their 5-a-day goal?

WEEK 3

Learning objective

- To understand the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and be able to make healthy breakfast choices.

Introduce the concept of breakfast literally meaning to 'break the fast' from our last meal the previous day.

Explain that this is important, as it prepares your body for the day ahead. Eating breakfast also helps us to concentrate and therefore learn.

Ask the pupils to share what they eat for breakfast and highlight the variety of options on offer. Display **Slides 12–15** and discuss the foods. Do the children think they are healthy or unhealthy? Why? Do they think they would enjoy the taste? Would they eat this every day or just sometimes?

Explain that foods with less sugar are healthier for their bodies and teeth, and that wholegrain options such as wholemeal bread instead of white bread will keep them fuller for longer and are therefore a better choice for breakfast. Can the pupils think of any other foods that they could eat for breakfast that would be a healthy option?

Ask for volunteers to share what they have eaten for breakfast and see if they can make any changes to create a healthier version.

If there's no time to eat breakfast, we may need to eat on the go. Ask the pupils to think of some healthy options if they can't sit at the table to eat breakfast – **Slide 17** provides some ideas.

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Assessment

Can the pupils create three days of breakfast meal planning using the **Week 3 resource**?

WEEK 4

Learning objective

- To be able to explain what a healthy snack is and be able to read a traffic light food label.

Find out if the pupils eat snacks. What makes them choose their snacks – is it purely taste? **Slide 19** will help prompt input and discussion.

Do pupils know how much sugar is the maximum that they should eat each day? Drop sugar cubes into a clear glass one at a time and stop when there are six cubes in the glass. Ask the children if they think that's how much children actually often eat per day. Demonstrate that UK children consume 13 cubes on average. Work through **Slides 20–21**.

Discuss **Slide 22** and explain that it tells us how much fat, salt and sugar is in the food. Provide some packaged snacks and allow the pupils time to read the traffic light food labels.

In small groups, ask the children to explain to the class what they know about each snack from the label and ingredients. Work through **Slides 23–24**.

Assessment

Can the pupils suggest some healthier snack alternatives using **Week 4 resource**?

WEEK 5

Learning objective

- To understand what a healthy lunch could consist of, and plan a healthy lunch using the Eatwell Guide as a tool.

Ask the children how they feel just before lunchtime. Explain that feeling hungry, thirsty and tired just before lunchtime is your body telling you that you need a break and to be re-fuelled. Ask pupils to tell you what they eat for lunch and discuss if they think it's healthy. Introduce **Slide 26**. Show

pupils **Slides 27–29**, displaying only the first image on each page initially. Ask the class if they think this is a healthy lunch and, if not, what could they change to make it healthier. Then reveal the second image on each page and talk through the changes with the children.

Assessment

Can the pupils individually design a balanced, healthy lunch using the **Week 5 resource**?

WEEK 6

Learning objective

- To understand why it is important to drink; how much we should drink each day; which drinks are healthy options; which drinks we should have less often.

Ask the pupils to put their hands up if they feel that they drink enough every day. Read through **Slide 31**.

Pour six to eight glasses of water from a jug, to show the children how much they should be drinking daily (or display **Slide 32**).Ask for a hands-up now if pupils still think they drink enough. Can the children suggest drinks that they think are healthy?

Explain that children should avoid sugary drinks as these increase the risk of becoming overweight. The added sugar, and carbonation in fizzy drinks, can also damage teeth. Show pupils **Slide 33**.

Introduce the Sugar Detective activity on **Slide 34** and split the class into groups. After the pupils have followed the steps, show Slide 35 and support the children as they calculate the amount of sugar in each drink.

Discuss if the results have surprised the children and whether there are any changes they would like to make to their drinks choices and habits. Finally, remind the pupils that water is really the best drink to choose.

Assessment

Using the **week 6 resource** poster template or paper of your choice, can the pupils design a poster explaining how much we should be drinking, the healthiest drinks to choose and ones that we should consume less often and in smaller amounts? **TP**

Hannah Shaw previously worked as a primary school teacher and is now the consultant teacher for the PhunkyFoods programme.

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Ways of GRIEVING

Bob Usher and **Tracey Boseley** provide insights and strategies for supporting children with SEND to navigate bereavement

There are unique challenges in providing support for children with additional needs to understand and manage their responses to death and grief. Professionals working with SEND pupils may feel they need to protect these vulnerable children from the realities of death. However, all children need to access the truth so that they can start making sense of what's happened.

Bereavement comes with a whole range of new language and sensory experiences that children may not have dealt with before. A child's needs may also impact their ability to understand, communicate, process emotion or seek support. They may have life limiting conditions themselves and worry about their own mortality.

What to say

Adults don't always feel comfortable using the words like 'death', but euphemisms can cause confusion. Use communication methods that meet the pupil's needs and are familiar. Words, symbols, or signs for 'dead' and 'died' are essential. It may be necessary to give the same information many times to help a child make sense of what has happened.

What to expect

Grief is natural and everyone grieves differently. Although pupils with additional needs may grieve in similar ways to other children, it can be more challenging for them to express their grief and associate their feelings and emotions with the grief that they are experiencing. Some may take time to process the information, while others will react instantly. What's important is to acknowledge that all feelings are valid.

News of a death can result in unexpected reactions, and pupils can seem unaffected or indifferent. They may respond with laughter and jokes, or by being silly and making noises. They could show concern, confusion and fear, wailing, sobbing or screaming.

Anger is a common emotion when grieving and can result in distressed behaviour that adults might find challenging. Help pupils by acknowledging anger as part of their grief and providing safe ways for them to express it.

Grief may be expressed through changes in behaviour – even minor adaptations to a child's usual responses. They may seek sources of comfort more frequently such as stimming, ticks, chewing and other sensory self-soothing behaviours. There may be changes to eating, sleeping and toileting patterns.

Bereavement may result in regression in a child's learning, behaviour and/or personal care. This can be difficult for the child, as well as those who are caring for them, particularly where the pupil has worked hard to achieve some of their milestones. Regression is a typical reaction when a child is grieving though, and is likely to be temporary.

It's important to take notice of all changes in behaviour and how these may be related to expressions of grief.

What to do

The following strategies are useful in supporting pupils:

- Keep to the usual routines as much as possible.
- Use social stories to help support the pupil in new situations they encounter.
- Give the child time and space to process change.
- Make sure they have access to resources, toys, activities, etc. that will help them to regulate their behaviour.
- Use emotion or zones of regulation charts to help them express how they feel.
- Remember the pupil's behaviour is their way of communicating.

During times of bereavement, all members of the school community need resources and support. For a comprehensive, free-to-access training tool for schools, created in collaboration with Child Bereavement UK, please visit, **sendbereavement.lgfl.org.uk** TP

Bob Usher is content manager at LGfL-The National Grid for Learning.

lgfl.net

Tracey Boseley is head of Education Sector Support at Child Bereavement UK (CBUK)

childbereavementuk.org

LET'S ROLL

Laura Di Pasquale explores different ways to use Sphero coding robots in the classroom

The concept of coding is often considered the be the domain of geeks and technology gods. But let's face it, in the current climate we live in, we're all going to need to speak a bit of the lingo. This is where Sphero coding robots roll in **(sphero.com)**.

The groundwork

Starting with coding can be daunting. The fear of the unknown, coupled with concerns about technical glitches, can be daunting.

But fear not! You don't need to be a coding whizz to teach it. Websites like **code.org** offer free resources and tutorials that can guide you and your pupils through the basics.

Introduce unplugged activities first. These are coding exercises that don't require a computer, making them perfect for easing into the subject. For instance, have pupils write 'programs' for each other to follow, like making a jam sandwich or how to pick up a pencil from the ground. Once they grasp the basics, move to visual programming languages like Scratch **(scratch.mit.edu)**, which allows kids to create programs by snapping together blocks of code.

To truly inspire children, it's essential to show them how coding is used in the real world. After all, it's not just about making pixelated cats dance on a screen (although that's pretty cool, too).

From self-driving cars to smart home devices that can remind you where you left your keys, coding and robotics are at the heart of technological advancements. Highlighting these examples can spark curiosity, make coding feel like magic, and motivate children to dive deeper into their coding journey.

"Robots aren't just for coding class – they can bring excitement to any subject"

Cross-curricular applications

Sphero robots aren't just for coding class – they can bring excitement to any subject.

One of the greatest strengths of these robots is their ability to turn learning into play. By gamifying lessons, we ensure children remain engaged, excited, and maybe even convinced that school is actually fun. Instead of just staring blankly at a textbook, they're navigating a robot through a maze, or racing their 'Spheros' in a high-stakes classroom Grand Prix.

Imagine a world where math class involves programming a robot to follow a path shaped like a giant pizza slice. Who knew geometry could make you this hungry? Or picture history lessons where pupils recreate the path of ancient explorers using Spheros, all while trying to avoid the 'pitfalls' (aka strategically placed LEGO bricks) of history. In science, pupils can program their robots to simulate the orbit of planets, ensuring no one ever forgets that Pluto still has feelings…

Your Sphero robot will come with instructions and online resources **(edu.sphero.com)** to help you guide your class to coding successes like these. Once you're confident with your device, you can try the following activities.

MATHS

Program robots to follow specific geometric patterns or solve math problems. Have pupils calculate the distance a Sphero device travels given different speeds and times. You can simply have a series of numbers on the floor, ask the pupils a question and they have to drive their Sphero to the correct answer.

SCIENCE

Use your coding robots to test and simulate the effects of different forces and motion. Can you build a ramp and calculate what speed and angle is required to enable your Sphero to climb the ramp and jump off the other end? (They're pretty sturdy.)

ART

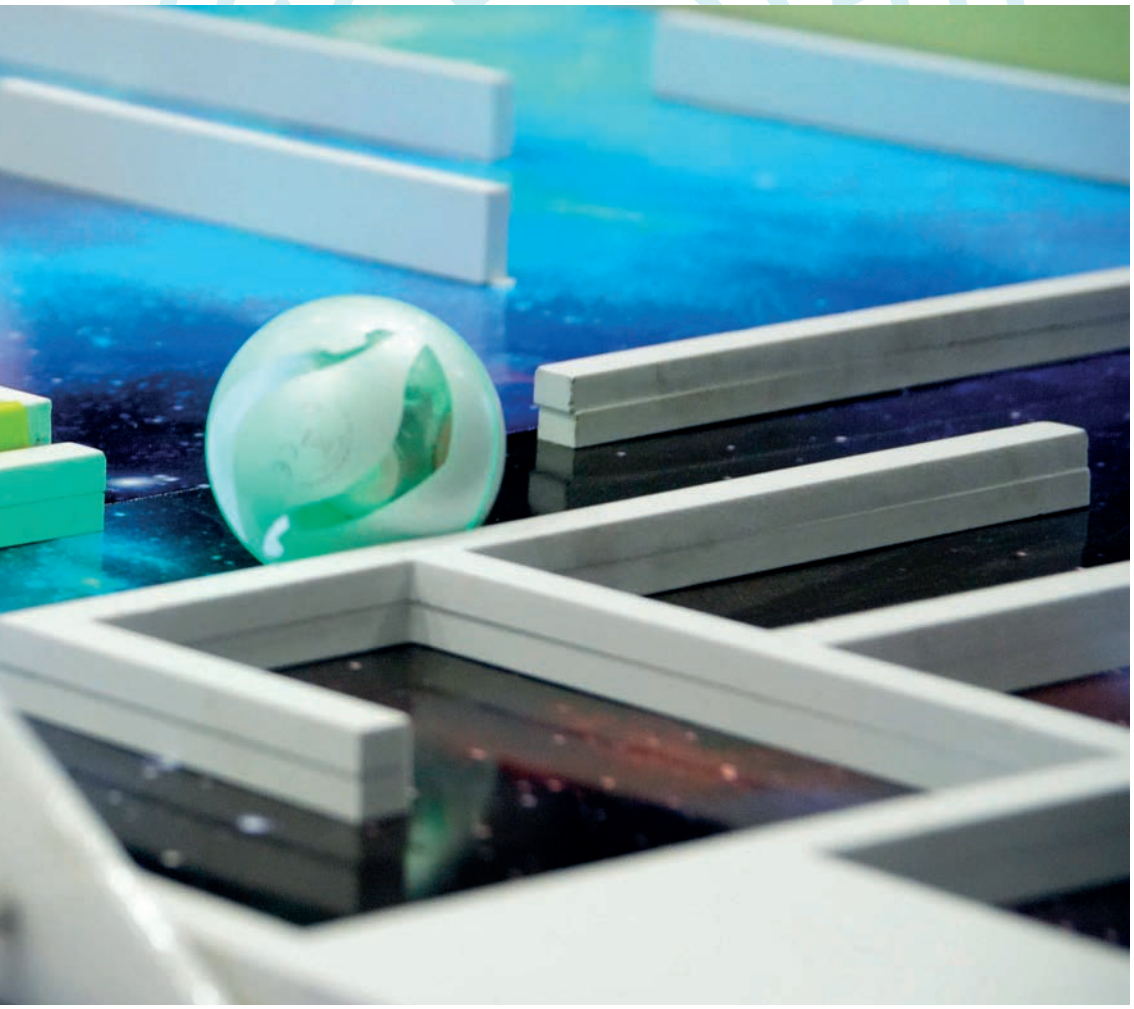
Attach a marker to your Sphero and program it to create abstract art. You might discover the next Jackson Pollock, or it could end up like Edvard Munch's 'Angry Dog' portrait.

HISTORY

Recreate historical events by programming Spheros to 'act out' scenes. Imagine a mini Battle of Stalingrad rolling out across your classroom with epic sound effects (including screaming, explosions and whistles blowing).

ENGLISH

Have pupils write stories featuring Spheros as characters, then program the robots to act out parts of their tales. You could simply use pictures from a famous story, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and ask the children to drive their Sphero from one image to another, whilst telling their story verbally. Integrating coding



robots into your lessons can make abstract concepts concrete and learning incredibly fun. WARNING: teachers become rather competitive with Sphero BOLT robots, and will enjoy playing the toilet-flushing sound effects, racing one another and crashing them together. It's best to do your training in a private room, away from the prying eyes of little children.

Your future with coding robots

The journey of integrating Spheros into the curriculum is like embarking on a rollercoaster ride, so buckle up and get ready for some exhilarating classroom adventures. Embrace the challenge with open arms and encourage your pupils to do the robot dance of excitement.

By fostering a love for coding and physical computing, you're not just preparing pupils for future careers; you're arming them with the superpowers to think critically, solve problems faster than a speeding algorithm, and create solutions that could save the day – or at least make lunch breaks run more smoothly.

Laura Di Pasquale is a primary school teacher in Glasgow. She is an Apple learning coach and micro:bit champion.

ROBOTS IN CLASS

- Invest time in training. Many organisations offer workshops and online courses specifically designed for teachers to get comfortable with coding and robotics.
- Form a support group with other teachers. Sharing experiences, troubleshooting together, and celebrating successes can make the journey much more enjoyable.
- Identify pupils who show a keen interest in technology and empower them to assist their peers. These 'tech leaders' can be invaluable resources in the classroom.
- Integrate physical computing into your lessons gradually. Begin with simple projects and build complexity as confidence grows.
- Incorporate robots into storytelling by programming them to act out parts of a story. This can enhance literacy skills and bring narratives to life.
- Combine subjects like history and science by having children program robots to re-enact historical events or scientific discoveries.
- Organise coding challenges or competitions to motivate pupils and encourage friendly competition. This can be a great way to showcase student skills and creativity.
- Give your class time to play and experiment with Spheros outside of structured lessons. This free exploration can lead to innovative ideas and deeper understanding.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Turn your children into language detectives…

DR AMANDA BARTON

"But I can't speak French, Miss." One of the biggest problems with learning a new language, for children and adults, is confidence. Encouraging children to look for clues and patterns, using the literacy knowledge and skills they already have, shows them how languages aren't as scary as they seem. This is a good way of getting the new academic year off to a flying start by revising vocabulary the children have already learned, as well as training their reading and listening skills.

1

Tell the children you need their help. You've just received an email from a teacher in France and you're not sure you've understood it all correctly. Read the message aloud, using lots of gestures. It might look like this: 'Je m'appelle Madame Rangier. J'habite dans un appartement à Paris. J'ai deux enfants: un grand fils qui s'appelle Alexandre et une petite fille qui s'appelle Amélie. Nous avons deux animaux: un hamster qui s'appelle Betty et un chat qui s'appelle Trixie.'

2

Ask the children to put up their hands if they understood anything in the text, making clear that they didn't have to understand every single word. Then read it aloud again. This time, ask the children to put up their hand whenever they hear a word they recognise. Ask them to tell you how they worked out the meaning. Did they see your body language and actions? Did they recognise a person's name? Did they spot a word that sounds like English?

3

Point out that pupils understand more French than they realised. They can use this knowledge to help them in their French lessons. Does anyone know what it's called it when we are just listening for the main points? It's listening for gist. Now hand out a written copy of the text. Read the text aloud again and ask the children to follow your reading with their finger on the page. Pause several times in your reading and ask the class to read the next word aloud.

4

Ask the children to give you a thumbs up with the hand they're not using to follow the text. This time, when you read the text aloud, make some deliberate mistakes. Whenever they hear an incorrect word, the children should give you a thumbs down and tell you what the word should be. Can they now underline, highlight or label all the cognates, proper nouns, numbers, pronouns and adjectives? Can the pupils suggest anything else they could label, such as verbs?

5

Show the children some different text types, either on the whiteboard or on a worksheet, including letters, recipes, menus, adverts, a weather forecast, TV pages and school timetables. It doesn't matter which language or languages the texts are in. The aim is to train the pupils to look at the format and work out what kind of text this is. Can they find any English cognates or other clues? Give each pupil a copy of the worksheet at **tinyurl.com/tp-Detectives** and ask them to write down what they've discovered.

Dr Amanda Barton is a freelance writer and educational consultant who has taught MFL in primary and secondary schools. She is co-author of Teaching Primary French *and* Teaching Primary Spanish *(Bloomsbury).*

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Collaborative LEARNING

Get children working in harmony to boost academic and social skills, says **Mark Martin**

Imagine stepping into a primary classroom where pupils' voices meld together in a cacophony of excitement. They're deeply engaged in collaborative projects, each contributing and valuing the perspectives of their peers.

Collaborative learning in primary settings offers more than just academic growth; it fosters empathy, promotes a sense of community and equips pupils with the social skills to thrive in a range of different environments. In this era, collaboration is a vital skill both inside and outside of school, especially now that we are in a global market. For educators, collaborative learning is not merely a tick-box exercise, but a mission to mould holistic individuals who can adapt in diverse settings. However, achieving successful collaborative learning isn't as straightforward as placing pupils into groups and hoping for the best. The challenge lies in teaching children to collaborate and helping them recognise when they're working together. Many young people will already be able to grasp the idea that 'sharing is caring'. Using this concept in collaboration can effectively illustrate that taking on different roles and responsibilities in a group is another form of sharing.

"The challenge is ensuring every voice, whether loud or soft, finds its space"

The 'symphony' of collaborative learning

Crafting a collaborative classroom is akin to orchestrating a symphony, with each pupil playing a vital role. It starts with the educator's keen sense of observation: you as their teacher must understand their strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, and fears. With this comprehensive insight, you can design group dynamics that amplify each pupil's potential. However, merely forming groups is just the beginning. The magic unfolds when these groups tackle challenges mirroring real-world scenarios. When pupils see the broader relevance of their task – whether designing a sustainable city or creating a community awareness campaign – their intrinsic motivation soars. They're not just completing an activity, they're making a difference.

Tackling group anxiety

Dealing with 'group anxiety,' where some pupils are naturally more assertive than others, requires a balanced approach. Teachers can allocate leadership roles, distribute tasks, and provide examples to guide the class. Creating subgroups within the larger group can help pupils tackle challenges while minimising conflicts arising from personality differences or friendships. Classrooms are diverse, with some pupils naturally taking charge while others are more reserved. The challenge is in ensuring every voice, whether loud or soft, finds its space.

Consider introducing a word bank tailored for different stages of collaboration for pupils to draw upon. Modelling collaboration will allow you to control the scenario initially. As groups become familiar with this type of activity, you can gradually grant them more independence. Additionally, the classroom's physical layout plays a pivotal role in collaboration. Consider the furniture arrangement and ensure it doesn't stifle collaborative efforts.

True collaboration

Beyond teamwork, collaboration instills numerous skills: effective communication, where pupils

not only express but ensure their ideas are understood; active listening, a skill often overlooked, yet crucial for valuing others' inputs; empathy; and resilience.

Regularly rotating leadership roles can be transformative, providing opportunities for every pupil to lead and follow, understanding the nuances of both. By frequently reshuffling groups, pupils learn to adapt and work with different personalities, a crucial skill in today's diverse workplaces.

As educators, our role isn't just to oversee these interactions but to actively mentor and guide.

Regular feedback sessions, where pupils reflect on their group dynamics, can be insightful. They learn not just to work with others, but to work better together.

Initially, collaboration might seem daunting to some pupils. So, starting with structured activities, providing clear roles and expectations, is advisable. As they become more comfortable, introduce open-ended tasks that foster creativity and problem-solving.

Here are a few guidelines to help with the process:

- Understand the objective – begin with a clear understanding of what you want pupils to achieve. Whether it's solving a math problem, creating a group story, or conducting a science experiment, knowing the goal will guide your strategy.
- Group dynamics matter – not all children work well together. Rotate group members periodically to foster adaptability and expose pupils to varied perspectives. Consider a mix of abilities, personalities, and learning styles.
- Define roles – within groups, give pupils specific roles. This can include a leader, a recorder, a timekeeper, or a presenter. Defined roles ensure each pupil has a clear purpose and responsibility.
- Scaffold the process – specially for younger pupils, collaborative learning can be a new experience. Provide scaffolding by modeling how to discuss, share ideas, and come to a consensus. Over time, as pupils become more adept, you can reduce the level of guidance.
- Create a collaborative environment – the physical layout of your classroom can promote or hinder collaboration. Arrange desks in clusters or circles to facilitate interaction. Ensure resources, like markers, chart paper, or digital tools, are easily accessible.
- Set ground rules – collaborative learning thrives in an environment of respect and active listening. Discuss and establish ground rules with your pupils. This can include taking turns speaking, no interrupting, and valuing every team member's input.

Collaboration is more than just a buzzword; it's a journey of discovery, challenges, growth, and success. Drawing inspiration from the book *My Teaching Routine*, collaboration can be likened to a live jazz band. The band members, much like pupils in a collaborative setting, have a shared purpose, trust, and innovation. They rely on one another to share chords, maintain tempo, and navigate musical transitions. The solo moments in a jazz performance allow each musician to shine, recognising their individual contributions. Jazz music embodies humility and togetherness; egos are set aside to harmonise as one. This mirrors the ideal classroom, where every learner strives for their best, supporting one another.

A classroom is only as strong as its least engaged pupil. Building this collaborative culture requires a sequence of steps to ensure everyone gets their moment to lead and shine. Initially, the teacher serves as the bandleader, guiding pupils in this 'zone of collaboration.' But over time, pupils themselves can take the reins, leading their peers in collaborative endeavours.

Shaping pupils to be not just better learners but better individuals equips them for a world where teamwork is often the key to innovation and problem-solving. To all educators, as we spearhead this collaborative journey, let's continuously ask ourselves: How can we refine, enhance, and perfect collaboration in the classroom to best serve our pupils? **TP**

Master the art of facilitation

- **Active monitoring:** As pupils work, circulate the room. Listen to their discussions, offer guidance when needed, and ask probing questions to deepen their thinking.
- **Feedback is gold:** After a collaborative session, provide feedback. Highlight what went well and suggest areas of improvement.
- **Reflection time:** Allow pupils time to reflect on their collaborative experience. What did they learn? What challenges did they face? This reflection fosters self-awareness and growth.
- **Stay updated:** Collaborative learning techniques are ever-evolving. Engage in professional development, read up on new strategies, and be open to experimentation.

***Mark Martin MBE is an assistant professor in computer science and education Practice at Northeastern University, London. He is the author of* My Teaching Routine.**

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At a glance

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All in it TOGETHER

Jonathan Arthur and **Gemma Hewson** explain how collaboration has improved behaviour and raised pupils' achievement in their school

Recent research has shown that almost a quarter of lesson time in mainstream primary and secondary schools in England is lost because of poor behaviour **(tinyurl.com/tp-BeSur)**.

But working together, teachers can find effective ways to tackle the issues they face. At Badock's Wood Primary School, three key strategies have been put in place to supporting collaboration to reduce the impact of poor behaviour and improve teaching and learning across the school.

Friday morning briefings

Collaborative working has been formalised with our Friday morning briefings, where we come together to share our challenges, learnings, and successes. These meet-ups provide different viewpoints staff can draw on to address any issues they're struggling with.

One of our ECTs recently observed that her previously calm pupils often became loud and over-energetic as they moved from the classroom to breaktime. Sharing her predicament with colleagues allowed us to ask questions about what happened right before the noisy behaviour started. This highlighted the need for clearer instructions at the end of the lesson. Colleagues suggested a change of pre-break-time routine to help the children navigate the transition more quietly.

Chatting the issue through helped the teacher think outside the box to solve the problem. She took the suggestions and came up with a different routine that helped pupils make a smoother journey to the playground. She is now using the suggestions to support a better transition the other way as well – from the playground back into the classroom.

Two pairs of eyes

It's not always easy to spot causes of classroom disruption or the barriers that hold children back. We've found teachers benefit significantly from having an extra pair of eyes in lessons.

All our classrooms are kitted out with video cameras, which teachers can use to record lessons if they wish. Viewing the footage, they can reflect on their own teaching or share clips with colleagues to discuss issues and continuously improve their practice.

One of the benefits of working in this way is that it helps teachers ensure each child gets the support they need. This can be particularly effective for supporting disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND. Being able to review the footage gives teachers the opportunity to improve their adaptive teaching techniques. They can spot when they need to explain a mathematical concept more clearly or make lessons more interactive to keep children engaged, so all students are encouraged to reach their full potential.

A Year 6 colleague noticed a group of pupils on one side of the classroom rarely completed tasks when instructions were written on the whiteboard. The children seemed engaged in the lesson, but when it came down to writing their poem or making their climate change poster, they just didn't get much done. Reviewing video footage, recorded using ONVU Learning **(onvulearning.com)**, she observed that her back was often turned towards one side of the room. This meant the pupils she was concerned about couldn't see what she was writing on the board.

To remedy this, the teacher changed her classroom layout, placing the desks in a horseshoe shape. She also put a big cross in red tape on the floor to remind her where to stand.

School-wide issues

Collaboration is also helping to address whole-school issues, such as the development of children's spoken language. Many of our pupils would write pages of beautiful text with facts about the great fire of London or tectonic plates, for example. But when asked to share orally what they had learnt, they struggled to articulate it.

Following staff consultation, we decided to remove written requirements in many lessons. This may seem a drastic move, but with everyone behind it, the strategy has improved children's confidence in expressing themselves. Outcomes have improved across the wider curriculum, as well. **TP**

Jonathan Arthur and Gemma Hewson are senior leaders at Badock's Wood E-ACT academy. Jonathan is executive headteacher and Gemma is deputy headteacher.

badockswoodacademy.e-act.org.uk

Money, money, MONEY

Add value to your next maths lesson by using coins to teach abstract concepts, says **Aidan Severs**

With the rise of contactless payments, either by card or phone, children today are less exposed to a physical representation of money than they ever have been. You don't have to think that 'cash is king' to believe that young people need to develop a good understanding of the value of money. Whether the future includes coins or not, we know that using concrete representations helps children to learn about abstract concepts.

The benefits of using money as a manipulative to teach other areas of the maths curriculum are mutual. Teach pupils to count in ones using one pence pieces or one pound coins, and not only do they learn to count in ones, they also develop a familiarity with what those coins look like.

Real-world maths

So what other objectives could we teach using money as a manipulative? Let's continue on the theme of counting. In Year 1, children aren't only taught to count in ones, they're asked to 'count in multiples of twos, fives and tens'. Look at those numbers – remind you of anything? Two, five and ten pence pieces, two pound coins, five and ten pound notes! Remember that at this stage, although children may be able to chant "Two, four six, eight…" parrot-fashion, it's still an abstract concept to them. So, providing them with a real-life, hands-on concrete object can begin to turn the abstract into something relatable and understandable.

Try the following activities, with the accompanying workmats **(tinyurl.com/tp-CountingMoney)**, to get children using money as a representation of counting in twos, fives and tens.

Using arrays

Model the following processes to pupils, and then guide them to complete the tasks themselves:

- Line up ten coins in an array of two by five (there's another link to the national curriculum). Using the index and middle finger, push two coins at a time to create a new array of two by five, counting in twos as it is done. You could ask additional questions such as "How many coins altogether?" once pupils have finished counting.
- Start with a pile of coins. Using the index and middle finger, push two coins at a time onto a pre-printed array, counting aloud in twos as it is done. You could use a two-by-five array to begin with, then two by ten to count in twos up to twenty **(see tinyurl.com/tp-CountingMoney)**.
- Repeat the previous activity, but as the coins are moved onto the array and the twos are counted aloud, write the corresponding number next to the coin.

In a similar way, these activities can then be repeated later on when you move on to counting in fives and tens.

Counting in twos

The focus of these activities is slightly different. Once children have counted single items in twos, you can move them onto counting items that represent the value of two, whilst counting in twos.

Model the following processes to the children, and then help them complete the tasks:

- Using either two pence or two pound coins, give children one coin at a time. As you hand the coins over, count aloud in twos together.
- Take a pile of coins. Using the index and middle finger push one coin at a time on to the multiples of two on a pre-printed grid **(see tinyurl.com/tp-CountingMoney)**, counting aloud in twos as it is done.
- Repeat the previous exercise, but start with an empty grid. As the coins are moved onto the grid, and the twos are counted aloud, write the corresponding number next to each coin.

These activities can then be repeated with five pence pieces or five pound notes for counting in fives, and ten pence pieces or ten pound notes for counting in tens **(see tinyurl.com/tp-CountingMoney)**.

Challenge!

This final activity might work towards the end of the year, once children are confident with their counting and recognition of coins and notes. It would also be a great extension for Year 2 pupils in a mixed KS1 class.

Start with a pile of mixed coins – either one and two pence pieces, or one and two pound coins. Count aloud in multiples of two. Each time a multiple of two is counted, select either a two pence piece or two one pence pieces and move them onto the same pre-printed grids as in the previous tasks.

As before, model each process before asking the children to complete the task. TP

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

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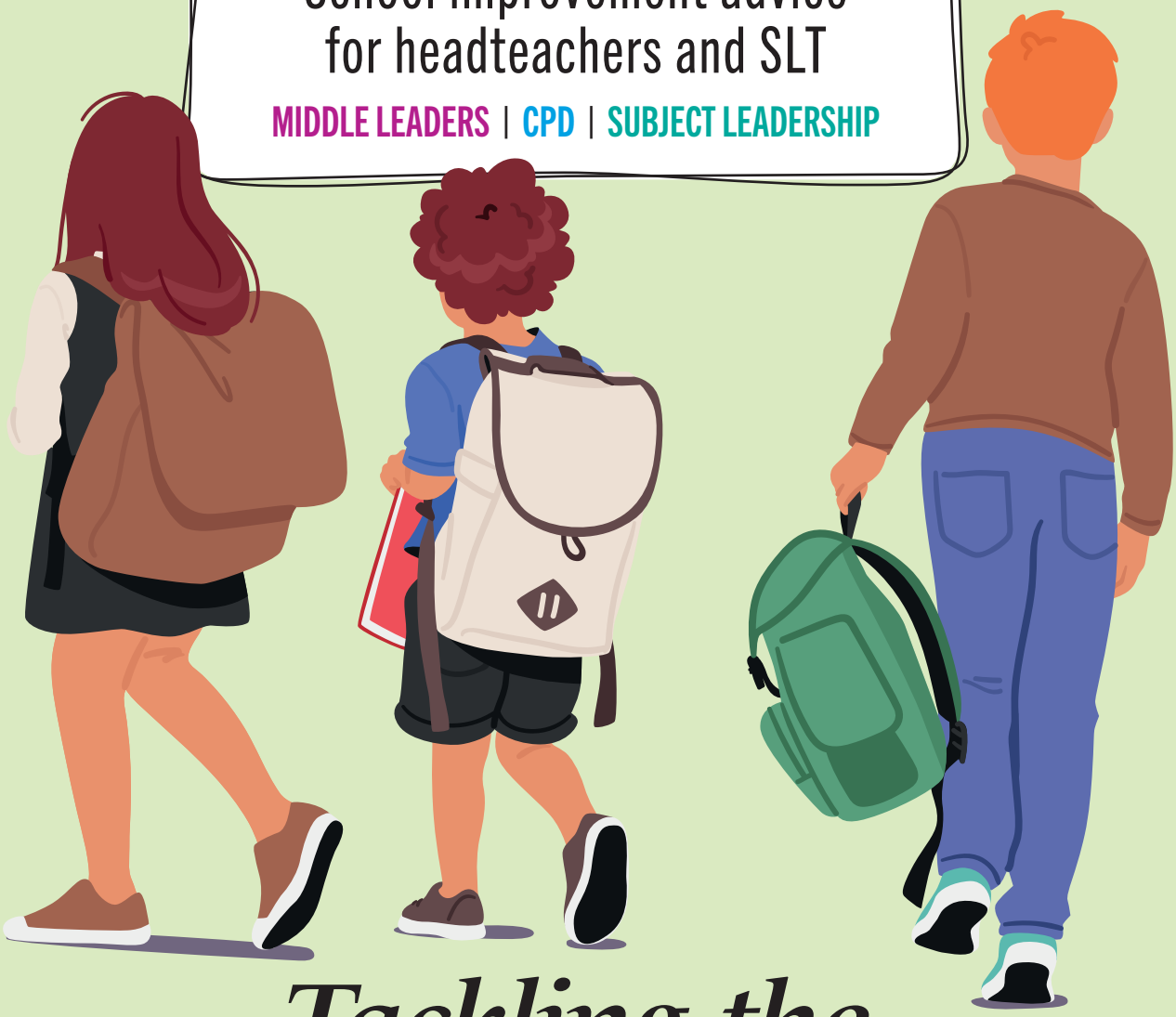


Tackling the POVERTY PROBLEM

Pupil poverty is short-changing children out of getting the education they deserve. In Watford, where my school, Parkgate Junior, is situated, research suggests one in nine children were living in poverty in the year to March 2023.

Our 240 pupils come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds; many of them live in the nearby social housing estate. Just 13 per cent of our children qualify for free school meals, which is well below the national average of 24.6 per cent, but hides the real picture. While Parkgate has below average numbers of pupil premium recipients, there are many families finding it hard to make ends meet but who don't qualify for free school meals. These 'just about managing' – or JAMs – include parents working two jobs and those involved in the grey economy. This is not unusual, given that 80 per cent of families using a food bank have at least one working parent.

Identifying the challenges

Our leadership team undertook training to help build awareness of financial barriers to education, identify problem areas and unseen inequalities, and discover more about breaking the link between financial background and educational outcomes. The training shone a light on areas we'd not considered before and completely changed how we look at everything. I'm always thinking of the cost to our families.

Working with two other schools in the area, we recently engaged the team at HFL Education to help diagnose causes and look at different strategies to address underlying issues facing children and families in their area. As part of the activity, staff, parents and pupils completed questionnaires, which served as a deep dive into the unique and common challenges facing the schools and the communities they serve. Using the insights gathered, we were able to put together a plan to make Parkgate even more inclusive, with a series of practical actions. These were small changes aimed at making big differences.

School clothing

Uniform is arguably one of the biggest expenses for parents after food. Many schools have embraced non-branded uniform, which can be purchased at supermarkets, and promote 'pre-loved' uniform to make it more affordable and sustainable.

PE kit was our biggest challenge. Some of our children never came in with a kit, so we bought it for them in the end. Plimsolls and outdoor trainers were particularly problematic: children's feet grow so fast! In response to this, we changed our uniform policy to allow black trainers as school shoes. This meant that if parents could only afford one pair of shoes, they could be used for both the school day and PE.

Trips

The cost of excursions is too much for many families to afford, so we explored options that were closer to home and on a smaller scale, to ensure cost would not exclude any child from taking part.

So, we now have a residential at school! Children sleep in the classrooms, we set up a virtual campfire outside and go to a local park in the day. We've done trips to nearby woods and class outings to the local post box to post a letter written in class. All these experiences are free or extremely low cost, but still enriching for the pupils.

School dinners

We made a number of changes to our school meals programme to ensure all our children were well fed and that meals were good value for money. It's really important that we provide satisfying meals that children want to eat, so we did a survey of our pupils to find out what they wanted to see on the menu. We updated the food choices based on their feedback and upped the size of our portions to make sure there was plenty of food on the plate. Our school dinners are now more popular, and less food goes to waste as children clear their plates.

A new normal?

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation released in July found that, on average, primary school staff estimated that 35 per cent of their pupils had come into school hungry at some point this school year. In deprived areas this rose to 45 per cent.

What is shocking about these statistics is that they are no longer surprising. Indeed, primary school teachers and leaders have become accustomed to supporting hungry children – whether in the classroom, through breakfast clubs or by paying for food out of their own pockets. Dealing with hunger has been normalised, and is routine for thousands of primary schools and their staff around the country.

Importantly, this is a matter of both hunger and education. Research has consistently shown that hunger in the classroom adversely affects pupil development and academic achievement.

Hungry children struggle to concentrate, have low energy levels, and are more likely to be involved in disruptive behaviour and be absent from school. Indeed, the same Sutton Trust survey found 74 per cent of teachers reporting an increase in pupils unable to concentrate or tired in class, and 67 per cent saying they had seen more students with behaviour issues.

The Sutton Trust has been calling for the expansion of free school meals, to make it available to all pupils in families on universal credit, and properly supporting breakfast club provision. In its election manifesto the Labour Party committed to free breakfast clubs in all primary schools, which is welcome, but there was no commitment to extending free school meals entitlement.

Targeted expansion of FSM eligibility – as opposed to a London-style universal expansion – makes financial sense, targeting support while not paying unnecessarily for those not in need.

Analysis by BCG for the Sutton Trust found that extending FSM in this way would cost a relatively modest £360m – £540m with possible additional one-off capital costs of just over £100m, benefiting between 700k and 1.1m additional students.

Dealing with hunger in the classroom has to be a priority for the new Labour government. Teachers cannot be expected to continue taking on this welfare role as a regular part of their job. With teachers' wellbeing, according to the charity Education Support, at an all-time low and with stress, insomnia and burnout all rising, it is not surprising that teacher retention is at crisis levels.

Pupil poverty is not the only issue, but if children come into class well fed, paying better attention and better behaved, then any teacher will tell you that that goes some way to preserving not only their wellbeing, but also their love for their job.

Kevin Latham is research and policy manager at the Sutton Trust. He previously taught social sciences in a state comprehensive and worked as a university lecturer.

"Parent communication is also key: for those experiencing financial difficulties, intervention and communication have to be respectful."

Fundraising

Parkgate Juniors has a pro-active PTA, but some fundraising activities adversely impacted attendance. If they didn't have a pound for non-uniform or a costume for fancy dress, children would not come in. If we do dress-up days now, it's something like wearing odd socks, so every child can join in. To make events (such as school discos) more inclusive we offer early bird discounts and family prices.

Getting everyone on board

Tackling pupil poverty is everyone's responsibility and that includes every member of staff, whether frontline teaching or office staff. Class teachers and TAs may notice some indicators of hardship and poverty, but equally our lunchtime or reception staff may recognise financial barriers we need to respond to as they interact with children and parents.

Getting our governors on board was also crucial because there is a cost involved in this work – whether that's a whole-school expense like our subsidised sports clubs or supporting individual families, for example by sorting their home broadband so they can do homework.

Parent communication is also key: for those experiencing financial difficulties, intervention and communication have to be respectful. We've also found there are difficult conversations to be had with our more financially secure parents, too. They want a full, educational experience for their child and there can be some frustration if we aren't offering those big experiences because they are not affordable for all.

If you'd like support, advice and tips on how to challenge financial barriers to education in your school, visit **hfl.mobi/eeearticle**

Sarah Pipe is headteacher at Parkgate Junior School in Watford.

Making space for able learners

The language relating to underserved pupils is continuously changing. We've been asked to 'close the gap' and 'leave no child behind', 'diminish the differences', to name but a few. However, what doesn't change is the understanding that poverty impacts on social, economic and educational mobility.

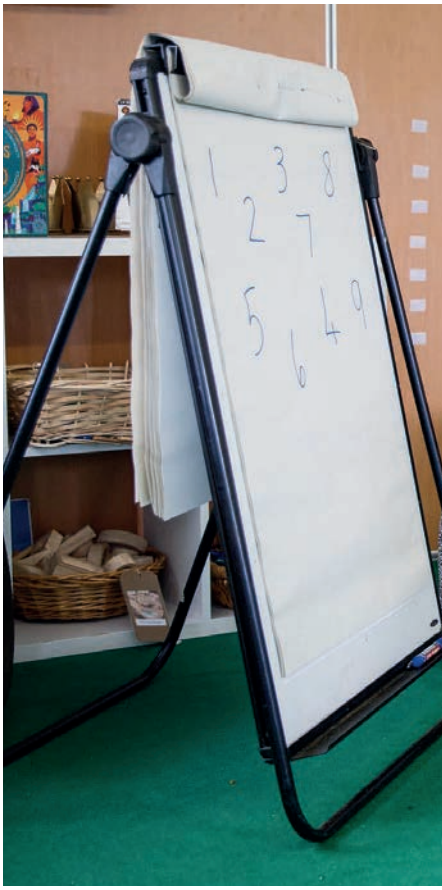
Young children coming from impoverished backgrounds who are recognised as more able at the start of their educational journey have already overcome statistical measures to successfully demonstrate developmental and educational milestones. As school leaders we take on the challenge to help them succeed. We need to provide them with cognitively challenging learning experiences to engage them and to enhance their development. We need an educational provision in which the individual is not underserved. We are challenged to help them become the best versions of themselves with the skills and attributes needed to compete equitably with more able pupils from all backgrounds.

There is no single solution; pupils need a rich tapestry of experience and opportunity. Through continuous provision, younger pupils engage in new experiences and learn practically. They develop language, recall, skills and memory. A classroom with rich dialogic discourse and higher-order questioning will engage and excite. What we hear and say enhances our knowledge of the world and develops cognition. We cannot assume that higher ability implies a knowledge of the process of learning. Schools must teach this precisely and explicitly through coherent structures and scaffolds. Through our 'making space for able learners' research programme at the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE), schools have shared with us a range of approaches to successfully developing and embedding cognitively challenging learning environments for all. For the next phase, we are focusing specifically on effective support for more able learners who face various forms of disadvantage. To learn more and get involved, visit **nace.co.uk/research**

Dr Ann McCarthy is research and development director at NACE. She was previously education director of a multi-academy trust.

It's all about ADAPTATION

Meeting children where they are, not where they 'should' be, is the key to great formative assessment, say **Ben Fuller** and **Felicity Nichols**



The Teachers' Standards, which set out the expectation for teachers to 'adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils', were introduced in 2011, but the use of adaptive teaching as a discrete term is more recent. The Early Career Framework defines it as 'Provid[ing] opportunity for all pupils to experience success, by adapting lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all, so that all pupils have the opportunity to meet expectations.'

Where you can anticipate and prepare adaptations in advance during lesson planning, this may reduce the number of changes and decisions you need to make during a busy lesson. Adapting your planning makes it inclusive by design, meeting the needs of your cohort where they are, and not making assumptions about where they 'should' be.

With thoughtful lesson design, not all adaptations will be visibly obvious in the classroom. In a recent drop-in we made to a science lesson that included several children with sensory needs, the teacher incorporated a movement break, as children completed a vocabulary quiz by moving to several locations around the classroom. This was an effective activity for all, as well as an essential adaptation for some.

With strong subject knowledge, you can anticipate the 'tricky' bit of the learning, know the common misconceptions and plan a range of subject-specific solutions to support children.

Adaptive teaching and additional needs

Adaptation can also mean thinking about the individual 'additional to and different from' support children will need to access the lesson. The EEF SEND 5-a-day **(tinyurl.com/tp-SEND5)** approach is a good starting point for implementing impactful strategies.

"Effective questioning strategies used before planning and teaching a topic can shed light on prior understanding"

For individual children with SEND, knowing and consistently implementing their agreed strategies and reasonable adjustments is essential; don't forget to use the written support plans agreed during the 'assess, plan, do, review' (APDR) graduated approach.

All children – not just those with SEND – might have specific gaps in learning, or misconceptions, particularly since the pandemic. Effective questioning strategies, such as concept cartoons **(tinyurl.com/tp-concept)** and true/false quizzes, etc. used before planning and teaching a topic can shed light on prior understanding, so that the teaching can be planned appropriately. The key is to seek out those gaps, i.e. to assess rather than assume.

What is responsive teaching?

When reflecting on the coining of the term 'formative assessment', Dylan Wiliam commented that it might have been more appropriate to call it 'responsive teaching', as the word 'assessment' can cause confusion or distraction by making us think about more formal methods of establishing what children know.

At its heart, formative assessment is about actively seeking to discover exactly what children understand (and what they don't yet) and responding to that

information so that your teaching is accurately pitched to their needs.

To be effective responsive teachers, we need strategies to:

- explore children's prior knowledge before starting a topic;
- monitor how well they are understanding new content during teaching, so we know whether they are ready to move on;
- assess understanding at the end of a lesson, so we can adjust our plans for the next lesson if necessary.

Effective questioning is crucial to all these stages. This means thinking about both the quality of the questions we ask and the mechanisms we use to find out what every child thinks.

Dylan Wiliam introduced the idea of the 'hinge-point question' – a good strategy to use during a lesson to establish whether all children understand the lesson so far, or whether some might need further explanation or support.

These often take the form of a multiple-choice question, because this is a quick and efficient way to gather the information on what every child thinks. By establishing an expectation that every child must show the teacher their answer to the question (whether that be by holding up a mini-whiteboard, A/B/C/D cards, fingers, etc.) a culture of 'no opting out' is created. You can then easily see whether all, some, or none of the pupils are on track with the learning. This is more effective than a 'hands-up' approach, in which you may only find out what one or two children are thinking.

Crucial to success is that the hinge-point question is carefully thought out in advance, so that the wrong answers tell you something useful – revealing any common misconceptions or specific misunderstandings. This helps you to know where to go next in your teaching. You could, for example, establish whether children have understood the difference between perimeter and area by asking them whether the perimeter of a 4cm by 3cm rectangle is A) 14cm or B) 12cm.

Strategies like these allow the teacher to make 'in the moment' decisions about how to proceed. Are some children ready to move on to some independent learning, whilst others require further explanation or scaffolding?

The goal is to ensure that no child is left behind. Rather than finding out at the end of the lesson that some children 'didn't get it', how much better it is to discover that *during the lesson* and to take swift action. The ultimate aim of adaptive and responsive teaching is to enable all learners, wherever possible, to achieve the intended curriculum outcomes. **TP**

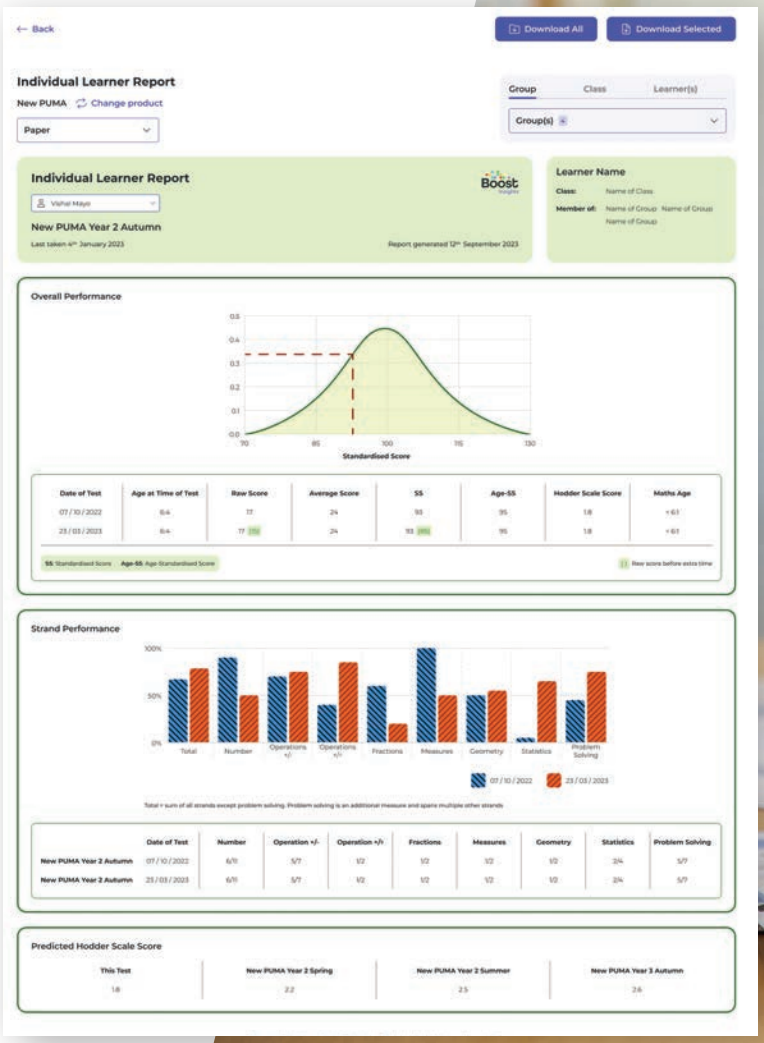
Ben Fuller is lead assessment adviser at HFL Education.

Felicity Nichols is SEND adviser at HFL Education.

hfleducation.org

TAKE-HOME TIPS

- Avoid making assumptions – meet children where they are, not where you think they should be.
- Know your subject well – understand the curriculum progression and where the potential barriers, misconceptions and most helpful pedagogies are.
- Provide written scaffolds (flipchart, slide deck, working wall, etc.) for the guided and independent practice part of the lesson for children to reference.
- Be informed by the reasonable adjustments and classroom adaptations identified and agreed for children with SEND.
- Model the use of adaptations, such as "I can look back at the working wall." and "I will get a number square to help me." so children understand how they can select and use additional resources.
- Use a range of consistent adaptations over time and across lessons – repetition helps children to use new scaffolds with growing familiarity and confidence.
- Use Q&A techniques that tell you what every child is thinking. You need to be able to scan all the answers quickly, so a single letter on a whiteboard works well here.
- Plan great questions in advance. You won't be able to conjure them up on the spot.
- Ask hinge-point questions at crucial moments in the lesson, to determine whether it is ok to continue.
- Pose an interesting question at the end of the lesson, perhaps in the form of an 'exit ticket'. This will confirm whether or not the lesson objective was met.
- Cold-calling can be an effective strategy. Combine this with short 'talk partner' discussions, so learners have the chance to articulate their thinking before you call on them.



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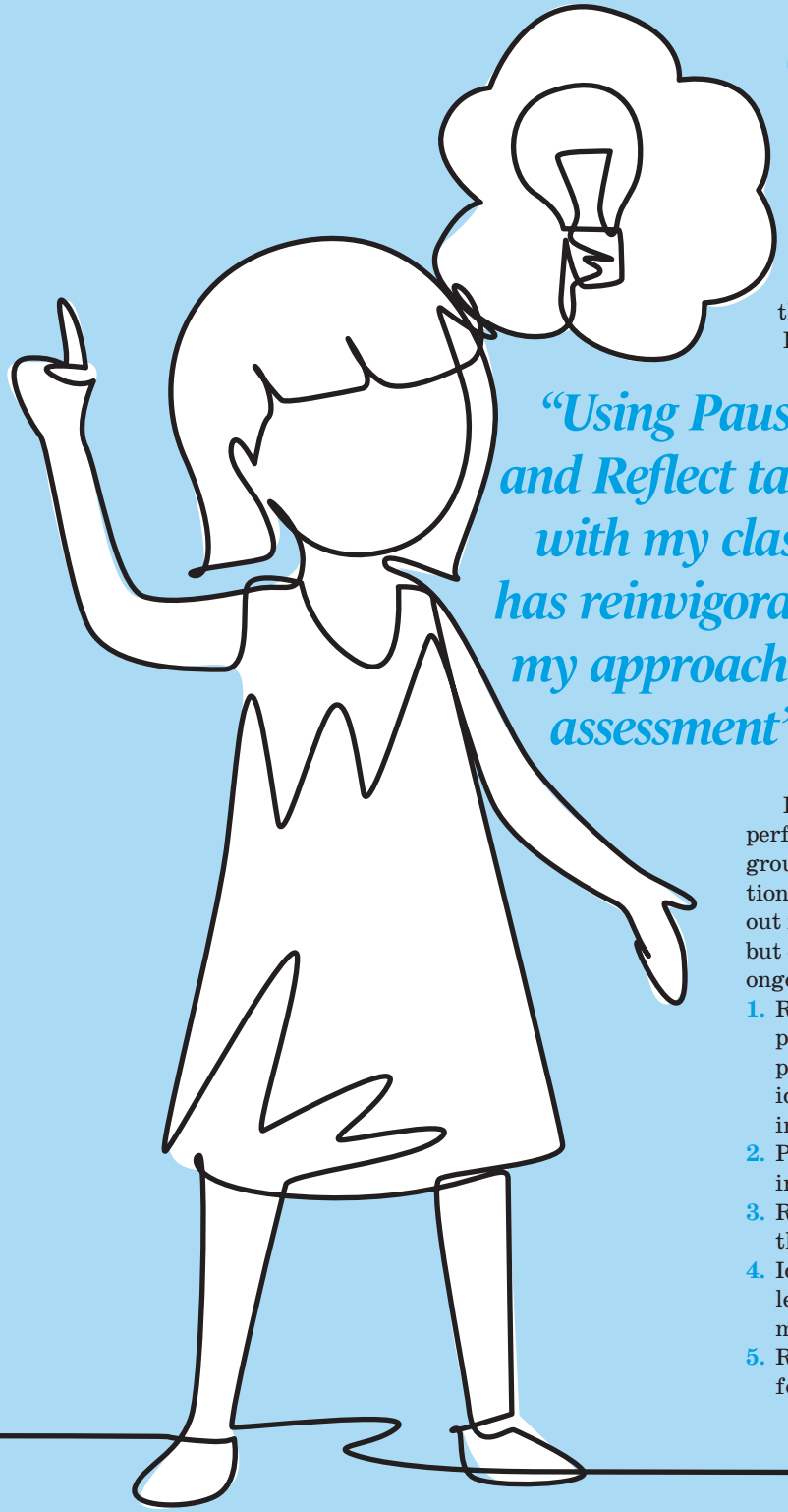
PAUSE *and reflect*

Marc Bowen explains how to plan and carry out purposeful activities for whole-class assessment



Over 25 years of teaching, I've seen many different assessment systems come and go; some faddish inspector-pleasers and others that genuinely contributed to the development of the learner.

Recently, I've found that using Pause and Reflect tasks with my class has reinvigorated my approach to assessment. Purposefully integrating them into my teaching offers a holistic insight into the development of the children in my class.

"Using Pause and Reflect tasks with my class has reinvigorated my approach to assessment"

Pause and Reflect may be performed at an individual, group or whole-organisation level. It can be carried out in a variety of ways, but essentially involves an ongoing process of:

1. Reflecting on existing practice, assessing pupil performance, and identifying areas for improvement.
2. Planning and implementing changes.
3. Reviewing the changes and the effect they have had.
4. Identifying what has been learned from the changes made and their effects.
5. Repeating the previous four steps.

What's the point?

For Pause and Reflect tasks to be most effective, it's important that they are considered and planned for at a medium-term level. This will ensure that they have a genuine purpose within the sequence of learning activities, making them more meaningful for the learners and easier to integrate into an already busy curriculum timetable.

In the development of a Pause and Reflect task, teachers should consider it both from the point of view of the children, as the active participants, and themselves – what does the educator want or need to achieve from the changes made?

When you're assessing their performance, pupils must understand why they are engaging with each task; as the teacher, you must be clear about what form of understanding you're hoping to assess. Having this level of clarity from the outset is essential, as you can only assess understanding if the children are purposefully engaging with a task that produces an output that a teacher can observe.

Thinking about Stage 1 of the process as 'What is your challenge?' forces the teacher to be clear about their goals, also making them easier to explain to pupils.

What's my role?

With this type of low-stakes assessment, it's important that all the children are actively and consistently engaged with the assessment task. Within my classroom, it's now common to hear the children talking about activities not having any 'passengers'. What they mean is that everyone should have a role to play and make an active contribution to the tasks at hand, to the extent that their individual ability and needs will allow.

By defining each child's role within an assessment activity, you will also strengthen the purpose of the task and help to place it within a meaningful and, ideally, real-world context.

Working in this way brings an additional, longer-term benefit: it introduces children to a diverse range of possible career routes. This can help to open up aspirations for the future and inspire ambition for their next steps. A change in mindset like this can lead to greater engagement with learning, as pupils begin to see that assessment experiences can help them reach their own personal goals, rather than just being something the teacher is asking the class to do for their own ends.

Assigning unique roles to specific children can also support teachers to go a little deeper with their individual assessments. For example, assigning an individual the role of scribing the task would enable you to assess the extent to which that child can make and use effective notes.

Who is the audience?

In the real world, it's always helpful for us as adults to understand the audience we are working to address, as this then informs the purpose of a task overall. Having an awareness of the intended audience for their assessment tasks will also support the children to remain focused on the 'why' of what they are doing. As long as there is a meaningful link to the purpose of the assessment activity, the audience could range from younger peers to notable public figures.

What are our success criteria?

Establishing the success criteria is the point at which the teacher can clearly and precisely define what they are looking for during the assessment activity.

When laying out success criteria, it's important that the teacher communicates openly with pupils that this task is part of an assessment process. The goal of this open dialogue is to help the children understand that assessment is an everyday component of the learning experience. It's not a high-stakes test, or something they need to do on their own without support; it is simply an exchange of information and experience between teacher and class.

This stage is most effective when the success criteria are co-constructed with the children, ensuring that they understand what the expectations are, so that they can work effectively towards demonstrating their understanding. Developing criteria collaboratively can also help the children to see how their prior learning experiences are now being built into an assessment.

A further element of the success criteria that can lead to greater learner involvement, is the inclusion of personal target setting. This might relate to a specific aspect of the success criteria that the children have been working to improve, or to a meta-cognitive focus, such as demonstrating resilience in their learning or taking time to edit their responses.

How will we share our learning?

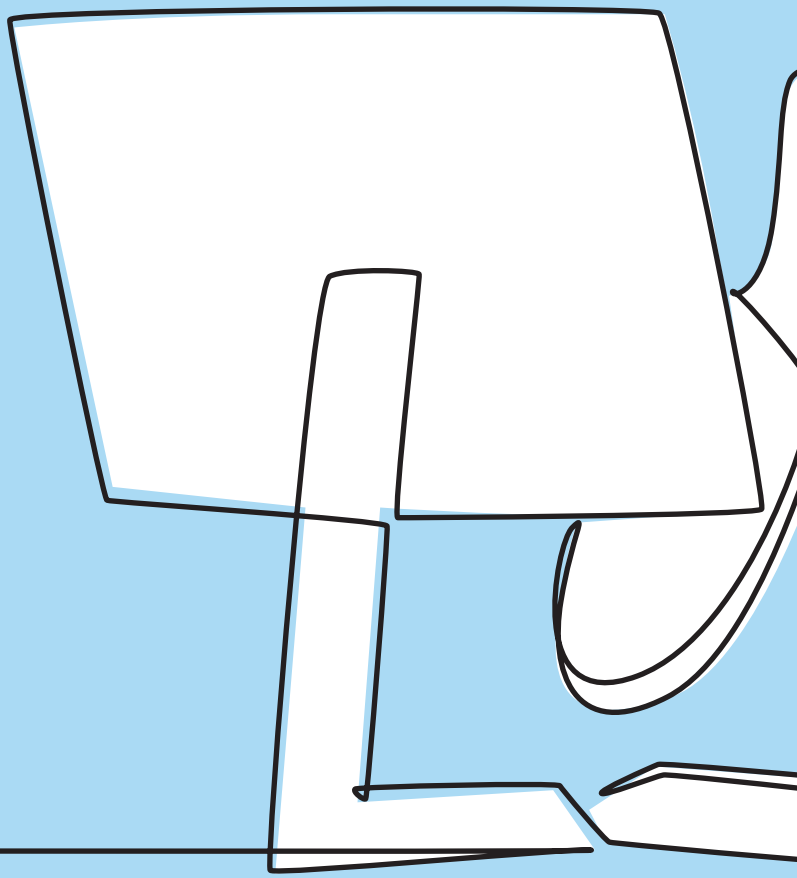
As mentioned previously, the only way to effectively assess the children's understanding is to give them an opportunity to tangibly demonstrate what they understand about a topic, concept or skill. Regardless of the context, pupils must have a clearly defined outcome for their learning, as you will need this final 'output' to effectively complete the holistic assessment that should result from the Pause and Reflect approach.

The children are engaged... what do I do now?

Once the children are working independently on the assessment task, you can begin the first of two stages of the assessment process.

Use the whole-class feedback sheet **(tinyurl.com/tp-PauseReflect)** as a purposeful scribble space – and be all eyes and ears. This feedback sheet is a place to capture simple, but meaning-laden, notes on anything that relates to the overall assessment, and which can only be seen from the practical element of the assessment task. When engaging in dialogue with individuals or groups, you can also note down: evidence of strong

"Assigning unique roles to specific children can also support teachers to go a little deeper with their individual assessments"



conceptual understanding; misconceptions that needed to be addressed immediately; or aspects of learning that might need to be revisited in the future.

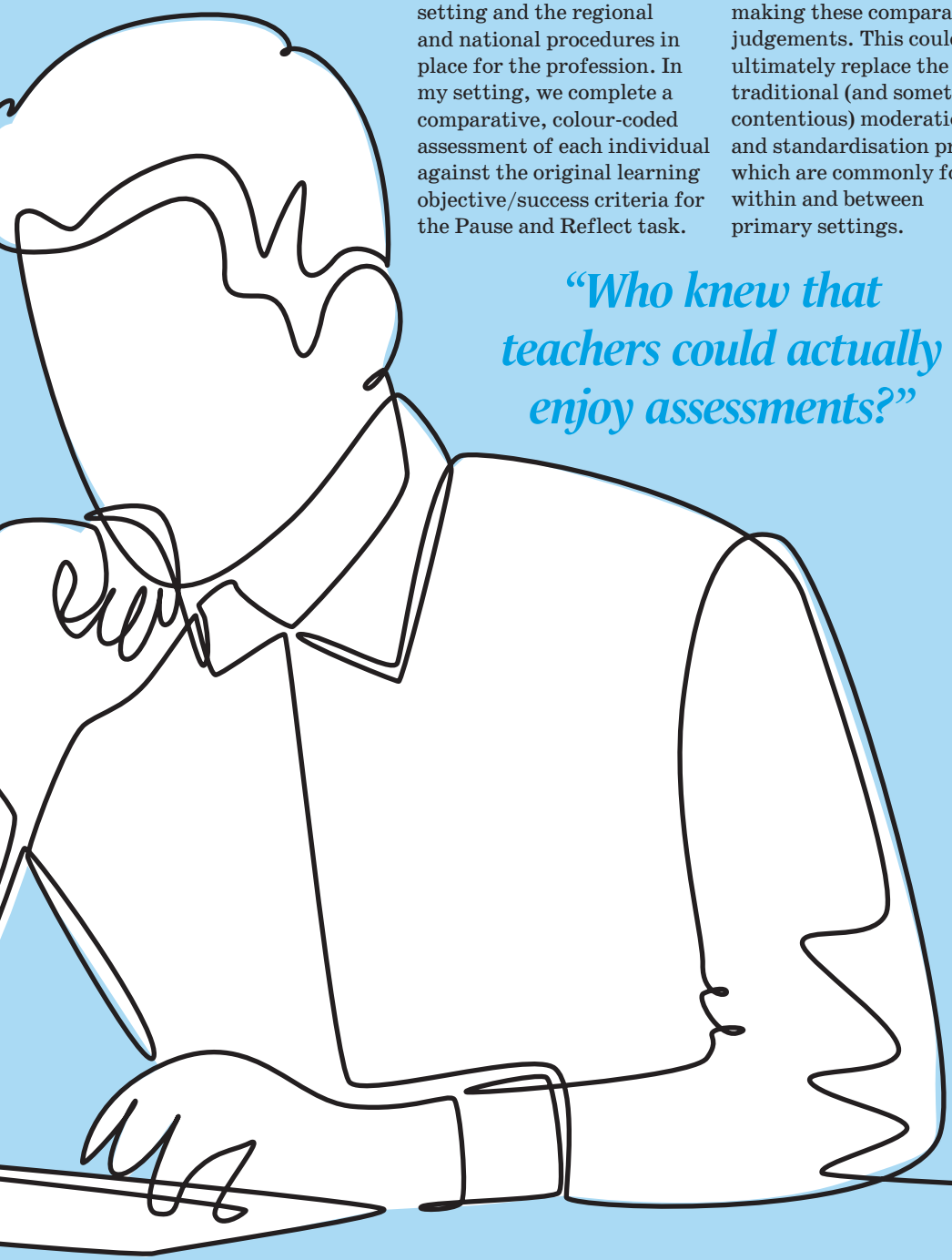
Whole-class marking

Once pupils have finished the assessment task, it's time to complete a more formalised 'whole class mark'. This stage offers a useful way of balancing teacher workload against the impact of the assessment activity. Rather than individually marking each piece of written work, or providing digital feedback to a multimedia product, the teacher spends time looking in detail at each piece. Whilst doing so, they note down on the 'whole class feedback' sheet, any common strengths, issues or next steps that emerge from the task overall. This may include 'remarking on the remarkable' – capturing specific assessments for individuals, whilst also gaining a more generalised view of the progress of the class as a whole.

How the outcomes of this process are then captured will depend on the individual setting and the regional and national procedures in place for the profession. In my setting, we complete a comparative, colour-coded assessment of each individual against the original learning objective/success criteria for the Pause and Reflect task.

The comparative process involves simply sorting the learner 'work' into four groups, ranging from those who have only partially met the goals of the assessment, to those who may have exceeded expectations. Children can then be given individual verbal or written feedback through a 'learning conference' process, or be assigned a numbered level or grade for each outcome.

Many assessment providers are now looking to the use of artificial intelligence to develop tools that will support teachers in quickly and efficiently making these comparative judgements. This could ultimately replace the traditional (and sometimes contentious) moderation and standardisation processes which are commonly found within and between primary settings.



"Who knew that teachers could actually enjoy assessments?"

FIND OUT MORE...

For a detailed case study, with a comprehensive selection of example assessment documents, please visit **tinyurl.com/tp-PauseReflect**

Following the completion of a Pause and Reflect task, the teacher should be left with: a detailed insight into the level of pupils' understanding; specific goals for individual learners; a clear direction for the class as a whole. Pupils should come away from the experience feeling that they have been actively engaged with a purposeful learning activity.

From my first-hand experience of developing and trialling this approach, I can confidently say that the assessment activities, and the outcomes that result from them, have provided me with some of the most useful, powerful and purposeful insights into the children in my class that I have ever encountered. Who knew that teachers could actually enjoy assessments? TP

Marc Bowen is a Deputy Head and primary teacher in South Wales. He is always keen to engage in professional dialogue, sharing ideas and experiences for use in the classroom. He welcomes any responses to this article or further questions through his email bowenm43@hwbcymru.net

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1

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Secrets of SUCCESS

Jamie Clark outlines responsive strategies to move learners forward

Formative assessment is central to effective and responsive teaching. It involves the use of strategies aimed at gathering information about children's progress so that teachers can adapt their teaching accordingly and guide pupils with clear steps for improvement.

In *Embedding Formative Assessment* (2015), Wiliam and Leahy outline five key strategies that underpin the effective implementation of formative assessment. They offer a variety of practical tips and adaptations for each strategy, assisting teachers in making informed instructional choices on a daily and moment-to-moment basis.

Table 1 outlines the roles teachers, peers and learners play in the formative assessment process as described by Wiliam and Leahy. So how can you implement these techniques successfully?

1. Clarify success criteria

Plan and script learning intentions to describe pupils' learning goals. Learning intentions should be supported by descriptive success criteria so that teachers and pupils can evaluate performance. Link learning intentions with anonymous samples of children's work to help them see what 'high-quality' actually looks like.

2. Elicit evidence

Eliciting evidence of what pupils can do is valuable for informed decision-making in the teaching process. Work with colleagues to plan effective questions that promote deep thinking. Implement no-hands-up approaches to get whole-class responses. For example, encourage active participation with cold-calling.

"Help them see what 'high-quality' actually looks like"

3. Feed back to improve the learner

Wiliam and Leahy (2015) stress that 'feedback should be more work for the recipient than the donor'. This implies that feedback should be clear, helpful and actionable, with the intention of improving the learner. Provide comment-only feedback on key pieces of work, and dedicate subsequent class time for pupils to respond.

4. Activate pupils as learning resources

Offer opportunities for pupils to support each other through the learning process. Scaffolded peer feedback can be highly effective – for example, employing 'two stars and a wish' criteria. Ensure individual accountability in group tasks by carefully assigning specific roles within the group.

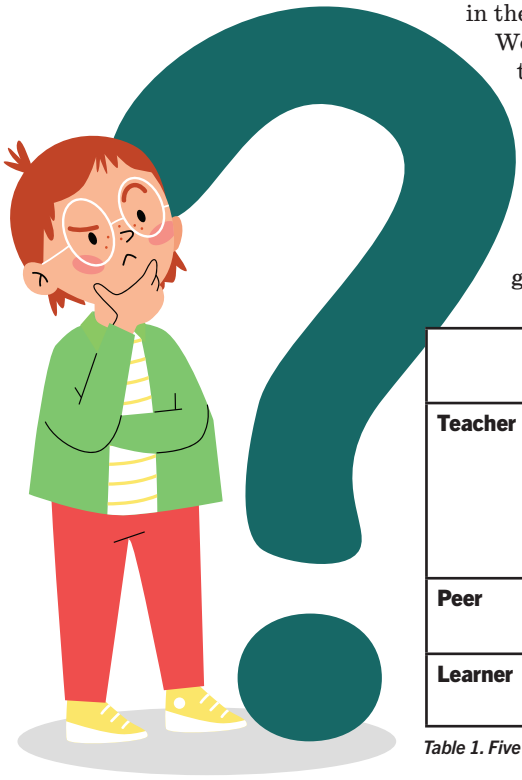
5. Activate pupils as owners of their own learning

Our ultimate objective is to nurture confident, lifelong learners who can flourish beyond the confines of the classroom. Equip pupils with a repertoire of metacognitive strategies such as reviewing their prior learning, stopping or slowing down to pick out important aspects of written information, and fitting ideas together. This will enable them to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning. TP

Jamie Clark is a lead practitioner specialising in pedagogy and digital learning. His book, Teaching One-Pagers, *is out now.*

@XpatEducator

jamieleeclark.com/teaching-one-pagers



	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is now	How the learner will get there
Teacher	1. Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria	2. Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning	3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer		4. Activating pupils as learning resources for one another	
Learner		5. Activating pupils as owners of their own learning	

Table 1. Five ways to deliver effective formative assessment

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Assessing ART

Adele Darlington explores ways to track pupil progress without stifling enthusiasm, creativity or confidence

Art and design is a beautiful subject: an area of the curriculum where we encourage children to embrace their individuality and communicate through their own unique works of art. In order to do so, they need to feel safe and comfortable during the creative process and be encouraged to explore, experiment and take risks. Unfortunately, the idea of having a work of art marked, or a sketchbook exploration critiqued, can thwart this desire and create unnecessary feelings of anxiety in the classroom.

There is a need to approach assessment in art and design carefully, with a specific purpose in mind and with a clear understanding of its subjective nature. The art world is huge, encompassing a multitude of disciplines, tools and media. Often, artists develop love and expertise in only a few areas of this vast expanse, so to attempt to assess and label a child's achievement across the whole art spectrum seems out of touch with the subject in the real world.

Different strokes

One child may excel in creating detailed life-like observational drawings but struggle to think creatively; another may have amazing abstract visions, telling incredible stories with a brush and paint but find the mastery of sketching techniques a challenge. So, how do we decide which one is the better artist?

We don't! That would be like comparing celebrated artists such as Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Alma Thomas, Amoako Boafo or Kelvin Okafor. They're all worthy of praise and admiration in their own right, but it's impossible to claim one is better or more talented than the other because, aside from their skills, the artwork is seen differently by different people. With this in mind, it's essential that we value and celebrate each child's personal progress and successes. We need to admire and support the unique journeys of our developing artists.

"Children need to feel safe and comfortable during the creative process and be encouraged to explore, experiment and take risks"

A blank canvas

The fact that there are no national exemplifications in the subject makes it difficult to shoehorn pupils into attainment categories as would happen in other areas of the curriculum. But assessing, knowing and understanding our pupils as artists is still necessary – just different. It helps us celebrate achievements, recognise strengths, widen skillsets and plan for progression – but all without labelling children as working towards, expected or greater depth. We need to be aware of each child's starting point and work with them through careful assessment and feedback to help them progress.

In primary art and design, there are a few key areas that pupils should make progress in, and these are where teachers need to focus their assessment. It's important that pupils are taught specific skills in using tools and media, as well as a selection of different artistic processes, in at least the disciplines of drawing, painting and sculpture. Alongside these skills and processes, children also need to be able to articulate themselves as artists using subject-specific vocabulary and with disciplinary understanding. It also goes without saying that we want children to retain key knowledge relating to the theoretical aspects of the subject, such as artist names, artworks or art styles.

Sketching it out

When planning to teach units of work, be clear what it is you want pupils to achieve.

What are the expectations of pupils during each lesson and what do you want them to be able to do by the end of an entire learning sequence? Being specific will help you measure achievement and give focus. When organising lessons, think carefully about this assessment focus: what do you want to know and how are you going to find it out? Is it through conversations, observations, a look at outcomes or a mixture of all of these approaches?

It's also important to think about whether you want to assess the whole cohort you're teaching, or just a specific group of pupils. If it's the latter, make sure you have pupils on a rotation so that you don't assess the same children in depth each week.

Portrait of the artist

To develop a picture of the whole child as an artist, it's essential to carry out a blend of both formative and summative assessments. Week by week, during art sessions, tune into peer-to-peer conversations and listen out for art talk. Are children discussing ideas, techniques and processes? Are they using subject-specific vocabulary?

Having a notebook or feedback journal open on your desk to make notes in can be useful. Tune into the objectives of each session when assessing, but also to the wider notion of the subject and what it means to work as an artist. Circulate the classroom and join in with conversations, effective questioning can help you deduce the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired during the session and retained from previous ones. It will also highlight any gaps that need addressing or revisiting.

It may sound obvious but observing pupils at work tells you so much about their artistic abilities. Remember, in art, the process is just as important as the product when it comes to the development of skills and techniques. Watch how your pupils handle tools and materials, apply what they've been taught, and approach exploration and experimentation. Do they learn from others, drawing on what they have seen then adding a personal twist to their artwork?

Make notes and step in to support development where appropriate. Try to avoid telling pupils what they should do, but in conversation, make suggestions for next steps and ask pupils if they thought about trying something different. This adds a more positive twist to feedback, celebrates what they have already achieved and puts pupils in charge of their own journeys.

Sticky notes can be your best friend when assessing art. Make notes of conversations and observations and add them to your feedback journal or stick them into pupils' sketchbooks. They won't deface the children's work in the same way that writing on the pages would, and you can even purchase tracing paper sticky notes!

The scrutiny of a final piece of artwork can tell you a lot about a pupil as an artist, but it's important to remember it won't tell you everything. If during a sequence of learning you want pupils to learn to mix different tints and shades of a colour and then they use them in a final piece, then you can be confident they have achieved that objective.

However, looking at a final piece in isolation will not tell you if that same pupil can articulate the process they went through to get those colours, nor will it tell you whether they can use subject-specific vocabulary to describe them. This is why, when assessing artwork, it is so important to do so in a variety of ways. A final piece, in collaboration with discussions with its creator, a study of their sketchbook journey and observations of them at work will provide a true all-round picture of them as an artist. **TP**

***Adele Darlington is an experienced teacher, art lead and primary art consultant. She is also the author of the Bloomsbury title* 100 ideas for Primary Teachers: Art.**

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Know your why. What is the purpose of the assessment you're planning? What is it going to tell you about a pupil, and how will you use this information to aid progression? Don't assess for the sake of assessing!
- Vary your assessment methods – each one is useful in informing you of different aspects of a child's artistic persona. Using a variety of methods over time helps build a wider picture of pupils as artists.
- Vary the focus of your assessment, too. Don't just look at particular skills or the retention of art history facts. Narrowing assessment doesn't do the subject, or your artists, justice.
- Each child's starting point is different; they are all on individual artistic journeys and progress will differ between pupils.
- Assessment and feedback go hand in hand. There's no point assessing if you aren't going to share your findings with the children. Effective feedback should be kind, specific and helpful!
- Use feedback time as an opportunity to encourage and motivate pupils as artists, focus positively on next steps and moving learning on.
- When assessing in the moment, and advising pupils on next time, make sure you actually do give them a next time to explore in.
- Art is subjective: it is an expression of an individual's thoughts and feelings. Always look at pupils' artwork through understanding and impartial eyes.

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NEW ARRIVALS

Caroline Scott offers effective ways schools can bridge language and cultural barriers to parental engagement

Having worked in many schools that had a large number of pupils with English as an additional language, one thing I feel deeply passionate about is the importance of raising engagement with the parents, carers and family members of EAL learners – especially those with low levels of English, or who may come from cultural backgrounds with very different expectations of how school staff should interact with parents.

Culture shock

It's always worth reminding ourselves, that the parents and carers of international new arrivals are often undergoing a similar transition to their child. In a possibly unknown culture, operating outside their native language, and sometimes with few or no members of a community who speak the same language around them, the grown-ups need support, too. Families like these have a significantly larger transition to make.

Unfortunately, whilst many schools have provision for engaging fluent English-speaking parents, they can struggle to connect with those from minority language backgrounds. From my experience, these parents can often be observed quickly leaving the playground after dropping off their children, and avoiding interaction with school staff. Thus missing out on the chance to develop those all-important relationships that are at the heart of every successful education journey.

Sharing and connecting

So, what can we do? Accept that communication is simply impossible with some families? Of course not! But the way to form connections may often not be obvious, especially when language and culture are barriers.

In the primary context, regularly inviting parents into schools to share their child's work or get involved in experiences with their child provides significant opportunities to further nurture engagement.

Bringing family members into school in this way is especially powerful for younger pupils, who are more dependent on their parents. The children tend to be full of enthusiasm for the idea of demonstrating what they've been learning; unlike secondary learners, who are working towards having more independence from their parents.

Inviting family members into school to work with children can have many benefits. First, it provides an opportunity for pupils to share their school experiences (and all the wonderful things they are doing during the day) with 'their' adults, who may not understand how UK schools work.

This will also give you a useful insight into how different families work together, and how you can support them further. EAL parents and children will naturally use their home language to communicate about the event or occasion they're attending, breaking down language barriers and providing a comfortable setting. Children often feel pride in translating their achievements for family members.

School events can also offer the chance to praise the use of pupils' home languages, and help ensure they have continued importance for the children and their families.

Sometimes parents and children don't value their home language until it's too late. Stopping using the home language can

have detrimental effects on English development and on learner identity. So, we should be encouraging parents and their children to enjoy and use their home language to ensure that they *add* a language rather than replacing one. We are after additive bilingualism (where a learner retains their main language), not subtractive bilingualism (where the learner eventually loses a language).

Ultimately, getting parents and carers through the door is the crucial first step to raising engagement. And they will often be keener to come to school for their child's benefit, than for a meeting with a teacher – which can be quite a stressful prospect even when you are familiar with the language and culture.

Once they're in the building, and enjoying time with their children, you'll have the perfect opportunity to meet and warmly welcome them, discovering more about the family, and showing them that they are valued members of your school community.

Taking it further

There are some really effective additional steps you can take to promote parental involvement, regardless of language or cultural background:

Create opportunities to showcase pupils' work – Organise events where children can display their work to their parents. Promote these events to the children, who can encourage their parents to join.

Host interactive school events – Arrange events such as show-and-tell sessions, or school fairs, which encourage parent participation.

Provide childcare options – Offer a creche during school events to make it easier for parents to attend.

Translate – Use parent buddies who speak the same language to support newcomers and translate welcome books and other materials. Involve bilingual support staff and the Parent-Teacher Association to help with communication.

Arrange for translated home visits – Some parents might feel more comfortable in their own homes. This will also help you to understand more about the learner's home life, which will, of course, play a role in how they apply themselves to learning at school. **TP**

Caroline Scott is the founder of Across Cultures, creator of the Learning Village programme, author and EAL/Multilingual advisor. She has previously worked as a teacher, senior leader, headteacher and parental involvement coordinator. Caroline has worked in schools around the world, developing English language skills for young learners.

learningvillage.net

WIN A BOOK!

If you are interested in this area, Across Cultures and the Learning Village are running a competition to win one of 25 copies of *Teaching English as an Additional Language: A Programme for 7–14 Year Olds*.

The book includes a framework of lessons that can be delivered to parents with little or no English. These lessons are similar to an adult ESOL class, but focus specifically on school-related English, such as school events, curriculum and parent meetings. When a teacher conducts these classes, parents gain valuable insights into the school and establish connections with teachers and the curriculum, greatly enhancing their involvement.

The book also provides a programme to use with international new arrivals as an 'induction to English', with integral assessment, as well as guidance on how to bridge the gap between EAL pupils and their peers. It is suitable for children from any language background and includes an EAL framework to provide structure to EAL provision across school, in addition to guidance on how to approach class teaching.

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A game of TWO CLAUSES

Laura Dobson breaks down compound sentences

My go-to document when it comes to grammar is always Appendix 2 from the English national curriculum. It gives succinct definitions that are easy to understand, and it will be these definitions that are used by the STA when writing SATs papers because, let's face it, grammar is a grey area! If you want to develop staff's understanding of grammar, turn Appendix 2 of the national curriculum into a booklet and tell them to have it in their classrooms as a dependable guide.

So, what does the appendix say about compound sentences? '*A sentence is a group of words which are grammatically connected to each other but not to any words outside the sentence. The form of a sentence's main clause shows whether it is being used as a statement, a question, a command or an exclamation. A sentence may consist of a single clause or it may contain several clauses held together by subordination or co-ordination. Classifying sentences as 'simple', 'complex' or 'compound' can be confusing, because a 'simple' sentence may be complicated, and a 'complex' one may be straightforward. The terms 'single clause sentence' and 'multi-clause sentence' may be more helpful.*'

When this appendix was released, it challenged the words I had been using daily in my English lessons as a KS2 teacher, but it also made total sense.

An example of a '**simple**' sentence could be: One winter's night, far far away from the city, a small child lay shivering on a small clump of straw. Meanwhile, perhaps counterintuitively, 'When he was running, Jim fell over.' is an example of a complex sentence

A complex sentence has a main clause and a subordinate clause; put simply, it needs two verbs. A simple sentence may have a number of adverbials, adjectives and adverbs, but it is grammatically 'simple', as it only contains one clause (or verb).

I still feel that there is a place for the term 'compound sentence', as the word describes what is does, but it is worth knowing the curriculum's view on the term and the fact that it is not a term referred to in SATs.

What is a compound sentence?

A compound sentence is one that has at least two independent clauses, usually joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semi-colon. You, and your pupils, can use the mnemonic 'FANBOYS' to remember what the coordinating conjunctions are: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So.

Some examples of compound sentences include:

- I ran to the shops for milk, but I forgot my purse.
- You can go to the party now or you can stay at home and watch television.
- Isla had an INSET day; she went to Thorpe Park.

How to teach compound sentences

The team at No More Marking have examined the nearly two million pieces of students' writing used in their assessment technique to draw some conclusions around children's writing **(tinyurl.com/tp-NMM)**. Their overriding finding was that children struggle to write accurate sentences, producing ones that are often incomplete or too long (run-on sentences).

"Don't forget that sometimes a short sentence is most effective"

Further research seemed to suggest that children don't understand what makes a sentence. Therefore, any teaching around compound sentences must start with a simple knowledge check: *Do my class know the key requirements of a sentence?* Word class knowledge is essential here. Some multiple-choice questions or a 'build a sentence' activity will help you gauge current understanding.

Sentence combining: There is a wealth of research on the effectiveness of using sentence combining activities to improve writing skills **(tinyurl.com/tp-ILKS2).** I am a fan of doing this physically by giving children sentences on slips of card and getting them to join them together with conjunctions. I usually incorporate colourful semantics in this exercise, assigning different colours to each word type. Depending on the age of your pupils, you can develop this simple, practical activity in a variety of ways.

For Years 2 and 3, write simple sentences about a character pupils are learning about on strips of card. Provide pupils with conjunction cards (and, but, or) and ask them to find ways to combine the sentences and conjunctions so they make sense. Extend the activity by adding adjective cards.

You can step this activity up for Years 4 and 5 by providing simple sentences in one colour, adverbials in another, and conjunctions in another – all on separate strips of card. Encourage pupils to change words for pronouns with a pen if needed. As an extension, ask pupils to use scissors to snip the sentence and put the adverbial inside so it still makes sense.

"Use the mnemonic 'FANBOYS' to remember the conjunctions"

For Years 5 and 6, provide simple sentences in one colour, adverbials in another, conjunctions in another, relative clause blank cards (a card with 'who', 'which', 'where' on and a gap to complete the clause) and semi-colons and dashes. To extend the activity, ask pupils to try different combining strategies (e.g. conjunction, dash or semi-colon), decide on the most effective for a particular style of writing and justify their choice. (See **tinyurl.com/tp-Compound** for some example words and sentences.)

Personalised dice: Give children a simple sentence and use a conjunction die to see how they need to extend the sentence. You might decide to make FANBOYS dice, but some of these conjunctions are quite tricky to use, or are more suitable for formal writing, so you may want to use just a few of them.

Warm-up games: Play 'Finish my sentence'. Give pupils the beginning of a sentence, e.g. 'Mrs Trunchbull went to the playground but...' Ask children to write a complete sentence on whiteboards or sugar paper. Share ideas, address any misconceptions and draw attention to clever use of grammar.

To join or not to join? Don't forget that sometimes a short sentence is most effective; three conjunctions in a sentence might not work. Discuss with the class the effective use of grammatical techniques.

Does it make sense? Some children – often, but not always, those with EAL – use the wrong conjunction for the purpose. Give pupils sentences where the conjunction has been used incorrectly, see if they can spot it and then ask them to explain why it is wrong. For example: 'My sister likes carrots, but she likes potatoes.' **TP**

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

- Compound sentences are taught in KS1, but ensure you make the link between this learning and your work on semi-colons in KS2. It helps make semi-colons a more understandable concept.
- If compound sentences and sentence combining are taught effectively, it will reduce comma splicing. When this misconception appears, discuss why it doesn't work, and offer the alternatives: a conjunction, advanced punctuation or simply a full stop.
- Don't make compound sentences sound like the be-all and end-all. Children need a variety of sentence structures in their writing for it to be effective. Promote that.
- Provide lots of models of sentence structures and have them on display. This will allow children to magpie structures but change some of the words.

Laura Dobson worked for many years as a teaching and learning adviser for a large company and local authority. She now provides consultancy and training in all areas of English.

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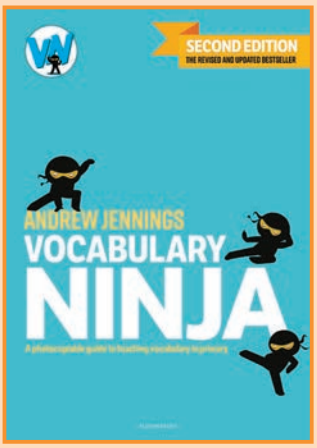

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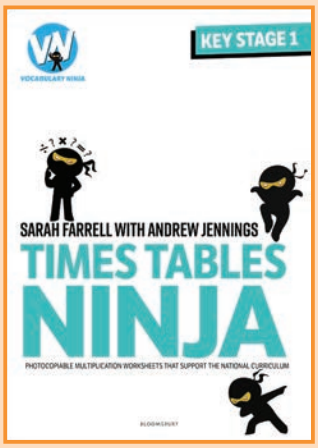

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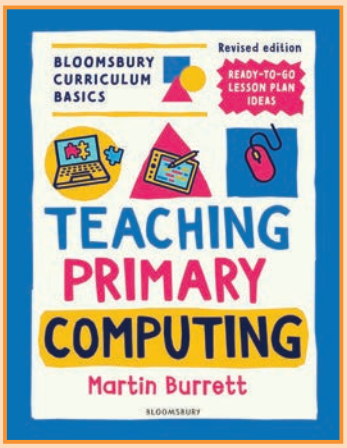

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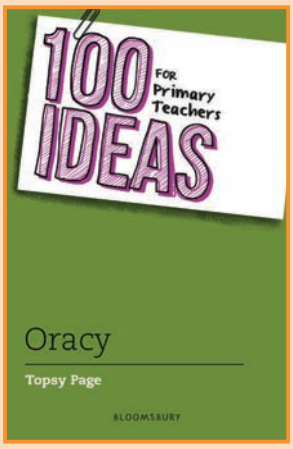

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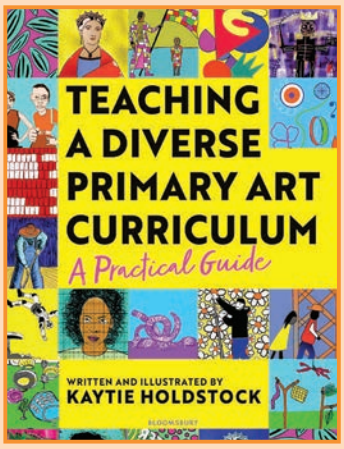

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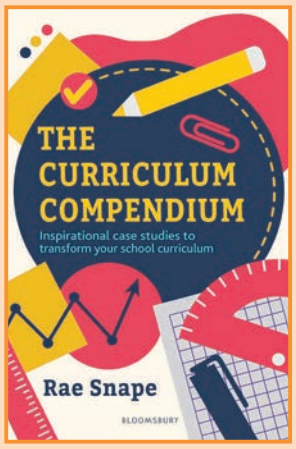

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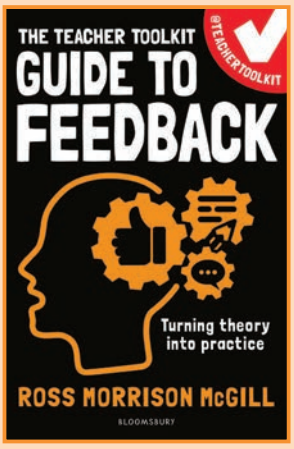

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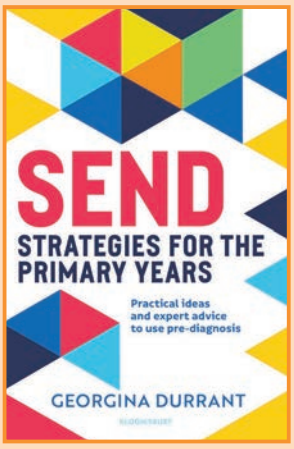

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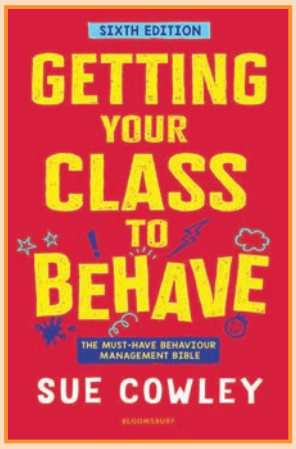

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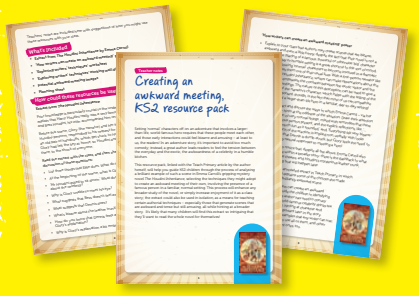


Download your **FREE**, exclusive teaching pack to help you explore both this extract and the rest of the book with your class.

tinyurl.com/tp-HoudiniInheritance

In *The Houdini Inheritance*, best friends Glory and Dennis are thrown headlong into a world of danger and mystery when they find themselves in possession of world-famous performer Harry Houdini's travelling trunk.

Nowadays, in real life, 'Trunk No8' resides in a museum in New York, put there by Houdini's brother, to whom it was bequeathed when the magician died suddenly in 1926. The final months of Houdini's life were plagued by his paranoia that a rival, or one of his many enemies, would steal the props and top-secret notes the trunk contained.

The Houdini Inheritance *(£7.99, Faber & Faber) is out now.*

It's certainly an intriguing set up for a fictional adventure, though first I had to work out how Glory and Dennis, two everyday British children, might cross paths with such a famous person in a way that felt authentic. Thankfully, the answer came in the form of an old theatre poster, which indicated that a routine part of Houdini's shows involved inviting audience members on stage to test his escapology skills by using their own handcuffs. From this, I devised the first scene where Glory and Harry Houdini meet. Things don't go well.
The handcuffs jam. Houdini is left humiliated on stage. Glory wants to die on the spot. Her only remedy is to take him back to her house, where the keys to the cuffs are kept.

There, Glory faces not only Houdini's fury but that of her elder sister, Effie, who's barely forgiven her for bringing a puppy home the previous day. Everything is meant to feel uncomfortable at this point: Glory is super-nervous, no-one knows quite how to behave, there aren't enough chairs to go round. As most writers will tell you, there's no drama without conflict, so we need the characters to feel awkward with each other for them to then work through their differences.

In terms of plot, this scene develops into the inciting incident, the moment when Glory's ordinary life changes for ever. By the time Houdini finishes his cup of tea and leaves her kitchen, she's already stepped into his world. **TP**

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE AN AWKWARD MEETING

UNLIKELY CHARACTERS

Make sure your characters don't connect straight away. This might be because they've previously had an argument or don't like each other, or maybe they're simply people who don't have anything in common.

SETTING THE SCENE

Have the meeting take place somewhere physically uncomfortable, so it's obvious your characters aren't relaxed. It might be in a stuffy train carriage, for example, or on the street in the pouring rain. An awkward setting will add to the tension.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

The right verbs and adjectives can really enhance the mood of a scene. When you're trying to create tension, go for a few well-chosen words rather than lengthy descriptions. Pace is important – you want your reader to be on edge.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Speech is a great way to show tension. In real life people often don't say *exactly* what they mean, especially when they're uncomfortable, so try to include interruptions, long pauses, and people saying too much or not enough.

NON-VERBAL CUES

Over 93 per cent of human communication is non-verbal, so it's a vital way to indicate how your characters are feeling. Tell us about their body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. Describe the way they fidget when they're on edge.

Extract from

Chapter 5, pages 52–53

By Glory admitting this, it indirectly tells us about her relationship with her elder sister, Effie, and that normally she doesn't appreciate being bossed about. Immediately, this sets us up for an encounter that might be out of the ordinary…

Effie quickly took charge of the situation, and for once, I was glad she did. Under her competent handling, the key turned smoothly and the cuffs opened, though once the initial relief had passed, Mr Houdini asked to sit down. And so we found ourselves sharing our kitchen with a world-famous performer, which wasn't as much fun as it sounded.

Initially, though, we think the peril has passed. Words like 'competent', 'smoothly', 'opened' and 'relief' lower the tension.

Glory assumes Houdini will leave once he's free of the handcuffs. This simple statement changes everything. It's unexpected, it suggests Houdini has something to say, and indicates that Harry Houdini, world famous for his brave and daring stunts, might be feeling tired, so introducing a previously unseen side to his character.

The setting for this awkward encounter adds to the sense of uneasiness. Glory can hardly believe that someone as famous as Harry Houdini is in her kitchen. It feels totally unreal

I'm building on this here by having Houdini do something really ordinary and normal, i.e. drink tea.

A mere half an hour ago at the Alhambra, Mr Houdini had been raging at me, so to now be sitting opposite him at the table, drinking industrial-strength tea, felt so awkward I could hardly meet his eye. Houdini, in his shirtsleeves, was still caked in stage make-up. In the seat next to him, Bess Houdini fed Eric milk from a saucer while Dennis, who couldn't stop staring at our famous guests, let his tea go cold. Meanwhile, Effie had given up offering ginger biscuits that no one wanted and perched on a corner of my seat because we'd run out of chairs. Our kitchen, small and cluttered at the best of times, seemed suddenly cramped. Everything felt very bizarre.

In the descriptions, I've highlighted that each character is doing something different, which adds to the uncomfortable, discordant atmosphere.

The kitchen itself feels small, almost claustrophobic. Effie and Glory are squidged together on one seat. Houdini's famous trunk is tucked under the table. This lack of personal space only increases the tension in the room.

Though I couldn't decide what was *more* bizarre – the Houdinis in our house, or that they'd insisted on bringing the scuffed leather trunk all the way upstairs with them and sliding it under the table so it sat right by our feet.

"They're quite unusual handcuffs, Mr Houdini," I reasoned, feeling the need to explain what had gone wrong. "They're tricky to open, even with the key, so hardly surprising, really."

Dennis gave me a 'stop talking' glare.

When Glory speaks in this scene she's not saying anything the reader won't already know. What she says doesn't add to the plot, but rather indicates how she's feeling. The 'hardly surprising, really' bit is what we call a 'redundancy' – the things we say that mean nothing, but are used to fill awkward gaps in conversation. She's babbling nervously here. Dennis's reaction confirms this with the look he gives her.

52-53

The punctuation PROJECT

Pie Corbett shares lessons and tips from a successful grammar programme

In the autumn of 2022, I tweeted a comment about how lots of children at Key Stage 2 seemed to be struggling with basic punctuation. This hit a chord with thousands of teachers – and so the punctuation project was born.

Our aim was to investigate what strategies might work to improve basic sentence demarcation. I teamed up with Eve Morton, school improvement advisor for English in North Tyneside Education Services. Initially, we worked with a small group of schools to refine our ideas. Then we trialled what we had found with a second group.

The project

Almost all the schools had no daily system for teaching and practising punctuation and sentence construction. We established a simple daily routine, lasting about ten minutes or so. The sentence work related to the text type being taught and was focused on what the children needed as writers.

We followed a simple teaching model, as shown in the panel opposite. Daily sessions hung around the notion that punctuation had to sit within the context of writing effective sentences, having an impact on the reader.

To develop the ability to punctuate automatically, children need to: hear sentences read aloud and spoken expressively; say sentences with fluency and expression; read sentences with meaning and expression; write sentences for a purpose.

This soon became a mantra that underpinned the daily sessions – 'hear it, say it, read it, write it'. We gave the teachers a set of sentence games to use, and from their evaluations and research feedback, identified the most successful.

Here are our top ten:

Spot the sentence

For this game, provide a list of sentences and non-sentences, for example:
It like a rat.
Gary in the building.
Cautiously, Gary opened the rusty door.

Children discuss which are sentences and which are not, and try to fix the latter.

Games such as this, which are intended for whole-class use, can also be targeted at a group who need extra teaching.

Build a sentence

Provide a word and ask children to use it in a sentence. Get them to 'police' their sentences: each one must have a capital letter and a full stop, exclamation or question mark.

Keep practising until everyone can automatically punctuate. Then move to providing two words, three words or even four words. Vary the word classes to include a verb, an adjective, conjunction or preposition, etc.

Vary the instructions, asking children to write, for example:

- *the opening line to a story*
- *a factual sentence about dragons*
- *an advertising sentence starting with the word 'Buy'*
- *a sentence to persuade, starting with 'Most people believe that...'*
- *a sentence with three powerful verbs, such as crushed, dashed, swept*

Mini whiteboards are excellent for this activity, because you can give instant feedback. Get children to work in pairs, taking turns as writer or teacher.

The sentence doctor

This is a simple idea for practising copy editing. Provide a list of sentences that have common errors. Children enjoy being the experts and 'fixing' mistakes. The key is to feed off the sorts of errors that pupils themselves make.

Dictate

Dictation allows children to be free from the challenge of composition to focus on the more technical aspects of writing: handwriting, punctuation and spelling. Practise the sort of sentences that relate to the text being taught and the sort of errors that the children might make. Include sentence patterns that are new or will help the children take a step forwards.

Innovate

Model the sentence pattern that you would like the children to work on. Discuss its construction and effect. For instance, in Year 3, you might work on using adverbs to start sentences. Remember to emphasise that punctuation must be accurate. Provide the pattern and then innovate, for example:

- Slowly, the tiger moved.
- Carefully, the tiger moved.
- Desperately, the tiger moved.

Join it up

Provide pairs of sentences to join, such as The cat hid under the table. and The dog growled. This game can be helpful for getting flow into writing by linking ideas as well as shifting into writing multi-clause sentences.

Finish it off

Show the class a beginning, middle, end or 'chunk' of a sentence, and ask pupils to complete it in their own way. It must be accurate and make sense. When playing these games, get the children to say the whole sentence to their partner before writing it down.

Begin by showing children the first part of a sentence and discuss ways you could finish it, e.g. *The old king...*

Then move on to the ends of sentences, for example, ... covered with red plants! Finally, and hardest of all, select a chunk from the middle of a sentence, such as ... *made up of all the* ...

Change it around

This is a simple game to develop the skill of sentence manipulation. Provide a sentence that has to be altered according to your instruction. For example, give the children a statement such as The old king sat down. and ask them to turn it into a question.

Try other instructions, depending on the text type. These could include turning the sentence into a newspaper headline, making it scary, or adding in some description or explanation. You could also challenge pupils to trim back overwriting, or link two ideas together in the sentence.

Compare different sentences

Present examples of the same sentence written in different ways and discuss what makes them more or less effective, and why. For example:

- *The man sipped his drink as he stroked the dog.*
- *The teacher sipped his cocoa as he stroked the poodle.*
- *The politician sipped his whisky as he stroked the Rottweiler.*

Improve it

Provide the children with a list of dull sentences to make more interesting. Show or model a 'boring' sentence and model how to improve it. Beware of 'overwriting' and instances where children just add in lots of words, e.g. *The tired, weary, ancient, old man...*

OUR TEACHING MODEL

1. Use assessment to identify grammar skills needed in a unit; build them into model texts or extracts.
2. Introduce and explore grammar through oral and written games and activities using model text examples as starting point.
3. Demonstrate how to use grammar features in shared writing and investigate in shared reading.
4. Practise and apply – expect children to use learned grammar features in their own writing, considering accuracy and impact.
5. Use feedback to check accuracy and effect, deciding what to teach next.

Tips from the classroom

Other aspects that were crucial in this project included ensuring that punctuation was modelled accurately during shared writing, often using colour so the marks stood out. 'Over the shoulder marking' and 'Spot in the margin' feedback during writing was key to immediate editing by the children. Finally, the evaluation showed that the project was highly successful in schools where the initiative was led by senior leaders with teachers working collaboratively. In these schools, the impact was dramatic. **TP**

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

Jonathan Cape

The Bumblebear

Join Norman the honey-loving bear as he tries to infiltrate Bee School in Nadia Shireen's charming picture book

JO CUMMINS

Those of you who haven't yet discovered the work of the wonderful author and illustrator Nadia Shireen are in for a treat with *The Bumblebear*. Nadia has written several picture books and a series of highly illustrated chapter books full of her trademark humour and subtle observations, which are a joy to explore with young readers.

Distributed to over 700,000 children as part of BookTrust's 2017 'Time to Read' campaign, *The Bumblebear* is an absolutely delightful story, which follows a young bear called Norman.

He's a bear who loves nothing more than guzzling gallons of honey and is always sad when it runs out. So, Norman comes up with a rather clever plan to ensure that never happens again...

This book is a great choice to use with children who are heading off to school for the very first time. It's also perfect for exploring ideas of acceptance and forgiveness with your class.

Apology notes

One of the key themes of *The Bumblebear* is that of saying sorry and forgiveness. Writing apology notes from the bees to Norman or from Norman to the bees, would be a purposeful way for children to practise their sentence writing. It also encourages them to see events from other people's perspectives and reflect on how their actions could impact others.

Ask pupils what they understand by the word 'apologise'. Can they think of any times when they might have needed to apologise to someone, or when someone has apologised to them? What did they do to say sorry? Draw a picture, do something nice for that person, give them a thumbs up? How about writing a letter or making a card? How did Norman try and make amends with the bees at the end of the story? (He chased away the big scary bear who trampling over bee school.)

After reading the story with the children, encourage them to think about

which events Norman might need to apologise to the bees for. (Eating all the honey in their secret honey store, lying about being a bee...) The pupils are going to make a 'sorry' card on behalf of Norman that he could send to the bees as an apology. They will need to write a sentence inside which describes what Norman is sorry for.

Create a creature

This text provides a great opportunity for children to play with words and create their own hybrid characters. Look carefully at the cover of the book. Identify the title, author, and illustration. Can pupils spot which two creatures have been combined to create a 'bumblebear'? Which other part of the front cover gives us a clue?

The children are going to create hybrid creatures of their own. You could randomly use two spinners to help children generate the first and second creatures to combine, or pupils could pick from a table with two columns. The first column will need to have the 'starters' of multisyllabic animals, for example, bumble, cater, ele. The second column needs to contain single syllable animals (shark, dog, cat, etc.)

Once children have got their animal names, the should draw a picture of their creature, adding a sentence describing what it looks like.

As an extension, pupils may like to create a labelled diagram of their creature, or include additional sentences describing their character, diet, or preferred habitat.

Norman's daily planner

The Bumblebear lends itself beautifully to exploring several KS1 maths objectives. In the story, readers get to see the timetable for Norman's day, which is obviously a great match for the objectives of ordering events and telling the time.

Ask the children what activities Norman completes during his day. How can we tell in which order he does them? At this point, children might point out the clocks, or the sequencing words used in the text (then, before...). Ask the children to sequence a jumbled-up version of Norman's timetable, using the clocks in the book to help them.

Are any of the activities in Norman's day the same as the children's? What other lessons do we have each day? Can pupils sequence picture of these and match the correct clock? In another twist, the children could have a blank clock for each activity and draw the time onto it themselves. Include some on the hour and at half past.

Honeypot inventory

Recap on age-appropriate vocabulary for capacity. Which terms can the children remember?

Ask the children to sort containers filled with liquid into sorting hoops labelled 'more than half full' and 'less than half full.' As a challenge, the hoops could overlap to have a category in the middle. Can the children say what should go there (half full)?

Can pupils order the honeypots from least full to most full? Add appropriate labels to denote how full they are, using the vocabulary discussed in the lesson introduction.

Honey store hunt

Tell the class that the bees have moved their honey to a secret storeroom to try and hide it from Norman. The children are going to help Norman navigate his way to the storeroom.

Have children stand up and physically demonstrate moving whole, half, and quarter turns. Practise stepping forwards and backwards (or north, south, east and west, depending on your class.) Translate these movements onto a paper grid or a grid on an interactive whiteboard screen. Model how to follow simple instructions to navigate a character around the grid.

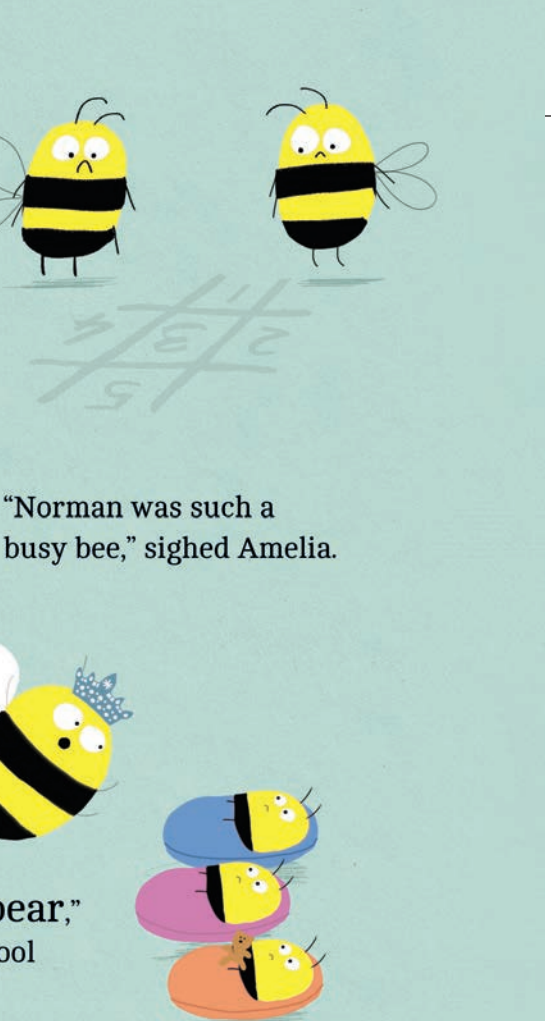
Now give the children pre-written

Take it further

FLUFFY BUMBLEBEES

Creating fluffy bumblebees will not only result in some rather charming bees to add to your own hive, it also gives pupils a chance to develop their fine motor skills.

Ask the children to describe the distinctive pattern of a bumblebee – look at some photos if this helps. Tell them they are going to be creating their own fuzzy bumblebees by wrapping wool around a sturdy cardboard template.



instructions to help Norman navigate the obstacles on the grid (the woods, the classroom, Queen Bee, flower patch, etc.) and reach the secret honey store. This would be a fantastic activity to do on a programmable device. You could also challenge the children to create their own instructions to help Norman navigate a new map.

Bee hotel

Part of the KS1 science curriculum focuses on developing an understanding of how different habitats provide for the basic needs of different kinds of animals and plants, and how they depend upon each other. *The Bumblebear* would be a good starting point for looking at the ideal microhabitat needed for bees and for bears.

Where have the children seen bees before? Create a list of places. What do all of these places have in common? Tease out that they are all likely to have been near to some flowers, for example in a garden, meadow, or orchard. Do the children know why this is? Can the children name the microhabitat bees live in? (A hive.) Look at pictures of the honeycomb structure of the hive and hives in general (manmade and naturally occurring.)

As bee populations are ever-declining due to farming and habitat destruction, making a bee hotel could make a huge difference to the local bee population. What might the inside of a bee hotel look like? The bees will need tube-like structures inside to live in. What materials could we use for this? Suggest a sturdy cardboard box for the frame with straws, reeds, bamboo cane, or bee tubes inside. Bee hotels could be made individually, in pairs, or as classes. Think carefully about where they will be situated.

I spy

Lots of previously common everyday words linked to nature and wildlife are slowly disappearing from our vocabularies, because they are not being passed on to future generations.

As teachers, we can help prevent this from happening by explicitly teaching these words to our pupils and using them in conversations. Part of the KS1 science curriculum is to name and identify a variety of plants and animals in their habitats. A game of 'I spy' (or a treasure hunt) would meet this need brilliantly.

Give each child, or group, 'I spy' cards with a variety of plants and creatures to try and spot in the school grounds (include photos as well as their names for easier identification). These could include: robin, buttercup, butterfly, woodlouse, oak tree, conker, honeybee, daisy, bird's nest. To make it more of a challenge, each item could be worth a different number of points, depending on how hard it is to spot.

Rather than providing them with pictures of the items they need to find, you could ask children to take photos themselves, which they can label later, perhaps with some additional information about the plant or creature.

Taking a rubbing of a leaf using a wax crayon and paper is also a fun way to help classify different species of trees. TP

Loved this? Try these...

- *Barbara Throws a Wobbler* by Nadia Shireen
- *Too Many Carrots* by Katy Hudson
- *Otter vs Badgers* by Anya Glazer
- *Nature's Tiny Miracle Bee* by Britta Teckentrup
- *I Saw a Bee* by Rob Ramsden

Jo Cummins is an experienced primary school teacher and English leader with a passion for children's books and mental health awareness. 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. She currently works for a specialist educational provision in Hampshire in a teaching and advisory role.

librarygirlandbookboy.com

Each child will need a corrugated card 'body' and some black and yellow wool. Show them how to wrap the wool around the body in a criss-cross fashion to create a striped pattern. It doesn't matter if there are some gaps between the wool. Use pipe cleaners for antennae, white paper for wings, and a googly eye as a finishing touch.

POLLEN TRANSFER

This activity gives children time to develop their fine motor skills and strengthen their hand muscles. To set it up, you'll need paper flowers with paper cups in the centres filled with pom-pom 'pollen.' You will also need some hexagonal shapes or frames to create a honeycomb (using a hexagonal pop-it would work well). The aim of the activity is to use tweezers to transfer the pom-pom 'pollen' from the flowers to the honeycomb.

FILLING THE HONEYCOMB

This is another fun fine motor skill activity. To set it up, you'll need a pop-it for the honeycomb (an egg box is a good substitute), some water coloured yellow, and a pipette. To complete this task, the pupils need to use the pipette to carefully transfer the 'honey' from the jar to the honeycomb.

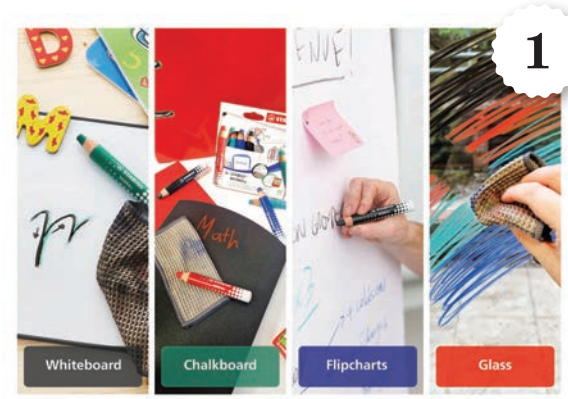
HONEY PLAYDOUGH BEES

Making playdough with children is a lovely sensory activity in itself, which includes maths and develops listening skills (**tinyurl.com/tp-Playdough**). Replacing some of the water with honey and adding yellow food colouring gives this play dough a special twist. Provide the children with pipe cleaners (for antennae), cotton buds (for wings), and googly eyes for a finishing touch. Use these with the playdough to create your own honeybees.

Top of the class

Resources and activities to bring fresh inspiration into your classroom

The STABILO MARKdry marker pencil



1

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

Visit **stabilo.com/uk**

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3

Affordable history-specific CPD

The Historical Association understands the importance of subject-specific CPD for teachers. That's why we offer a wide range of affordable face-to-face, online and webinar-based history CPD. No matter your location or budget, you and your colleagues can access top-tier professional development. Whether you're a history subject leader focusing on whole-school needs or a classroom teacher seeking effective teaching support, we have events and courses for you.

View the CPD on offer at **history.org.uk/go/primarycpd**

Call **0300 100 0223**

4

Scanning pens

C-Pen Reader 2 is an STA-approved reading pen that's prepped and ready to take your learners to the next level. Being a student with reading and comprehension differences can feel isolating, but this device has proven to increase reading and comprehension by ten months after just eight weeks of use. We know the C-Pen Reader 2 is the right devices to provide support, but if you need some convincing why not see for yourselves, take advantage of our free 30-day trials, sign up now at **scanningpens.co.uk/request-trial**

2

500 words

BBC's 500 Words – the UK's largest writing competition for children aged five to 11 – returns in September 2024.

500 Words encourages children of all abilities to write the story they would love to read in 500 words or less, without having to worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation.

The competition opens on Tuesday 24 September until 9pm on Friday 8 November 2024 – with the winners revealed on World Book Day 2025. Registration for teachers, teaching assistants and librarians to sign up as a volunteer judge for the 2024/25 competition is now open at **bbc.co.uk/500words**

5

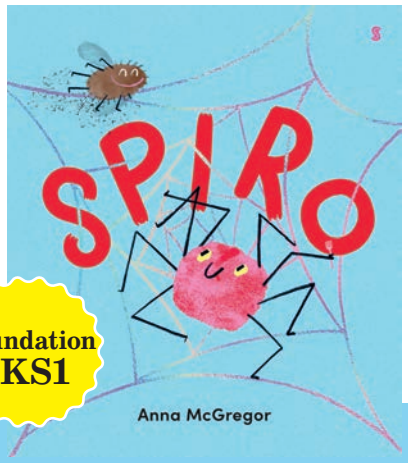
Bloomsbury Curriculum Basics

The Bloomsbury Curriculum Basics series provides non-specialist primary school teachers with subject knowledge and full teaching programmes in a variety of key primary curriculum subjects. Our 2024 revised editions for history, computing, science and geography are fully updated and in line with National Curriculum guidelines for KS1 and KS2. The books provides easy-to-follow lesson plan ideas that are packed full of guidance and activities, alongside helpful summaries, interesting facts, key vocabulary, useful websites and cross-curricular links.

You can save 30% on this series and more in the Bloomsbury Education Back to School Sale until 30th September! Visit **bloomsbury.com/B2Ssale**

Book CLUB

We review five new titles that your class will love



Foundation /KS1

KS1

KS2

Spiro

by Anna McGregor

(£7.99, Scribble)

Do you know the all-important *recipe for success*? According to Spiro, it's 11 per cent hunger, 34 per cent trying again (and AGAIN!), 53 per cent giving it another shot, and 2 per cent luck. Plus, quite a bit of spider silk...

Our eight-legged hero's search for a decent meal may be thwarted at every turn, but his determination, hard work and resilience shine through. Spiro makes a compelling role model, and his actions and reactions will prompt discussions about failure and success.

Anna McGregor shows rather than tells: cause and effect is a key story component, with text and pictures working together to suggest more than first meets the eye. Spiro's neon body makes a visual splash, and changes in viewpoint add to the humour and suspense.

Mushrooms Know: Wisdom From Our Friends the Fungi

by Kallie George, illus. Sara Gillingham

(£12.99, Greystone Kids)

This stylish picturebook explores the mysterious world of fungi in ways that invite different types of connection and reflection, and is notably well designed.

Clearly written sidebars present information about topics such as underground networks, bioluminescence and life cycles, but the headline text takes a more philosophical approach. Expressed lyrically in terms of the 'things mushrooms know', many of its statements chime with key PSHE themes (*small can be mighty; the value of staying connected to each other and the environment...*) and will add depth and breadth to your unpacking.

Sara Gillingham's fungi are expressive little characters, inviting imaginative responses to this fascinating subject, and her appealing print-style illustrations have a strong contemporary feel.

Hannah Messenger and the Gods of Hockwold

by Bryony Pearce, illus. Claire Powell

(£7.99, UCLan Publishing)

Power comes in different forms... could working together be one of them?

Modern technology doesn't suit the Greek Gods, so they've retired to the sleepy English village of Hockwold-cum-Wilton, where their grandchildren lead double lives. In Wilton, Hannah and her friends are (almost) ordinary, but passing the boundary stone to Hockwold transforms everything.

Magic is part of daily life, until a series of mysterious thefts drains Hockwold's power. Hannah and her classmates will have to bury their arguments to save everything they know and (sometimes) love...

Pearce's perspective on the Greek Gods is hugely entertaining: confident readers will enjoy this pacey, well-told story and it would make a great read-aloud for classes learning about Greek mythology.

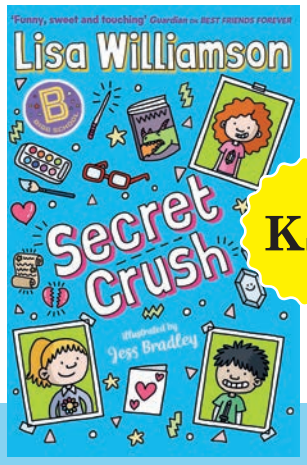
RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

plazoom

BUILD WORD POWER

Word Whoosh, from Plazoom, is designed to clarify and extend children's understanding of tier 2 words from Reception to Y6+, enabling them to make more ambitious and accurate language choices when speaking and writing. Each resource pack explores six words through a series of four mini-lessons: read and visualise, associate, understand, and define and master (based on the Frayer model).

Find out more at **bit.ly/PlzWords**



KS2

Bigg School: Secret Crush

by Lisa Williamson, illus. Jess Bradley

(£7.99, Guppy Books)

Sweaty palms, a racing heart, randomly throwing cutlery around… what on earth is wrong with Astrid? Could it be she has a crush? "Ew!" says best friend Lola.

This upbeat story explores new and tricky situations in a matter-of-fact way through the eyes of a book-loving eleven-year-old. Our quirky heroine has a refreshing sense of self – and of her own worth – and is motivated by her love of storytelling and ambitions to be a writer. But when she's hit by a slew of brand-new emotions, and a bump in the road of her journey to writing success, even Astrid starts to doubt herself.

Offering useful lessons in how to resolve everyday relationship issues without drama, *Secret Crush* is a fun and reassuring read, ideal for children who might be worried about the transition to secondary.

KS2

The Boy in the Suit

by James Fox

(£7.99, Scholastic)

Solo's always worn his suit for funerals. Morag says he needs to look the part, and besides, the pockets are great for hiding sandwiches. But lately Solo's been questioning everything, including his mum's point of view. Couldn't they use a food bank sometimes, instead of crashing funerals?

Then Morag gets caught at a celebrity event and everything changes. Social media judges them, and ten-year-old Solo finds himself in charge…

This sensitive and engrossing UKS2 novel tells the story of Morag's disappearance from Solo's perspective. Addressing complex real-world issues (the cost-of-living crisis, mental health, friendship problems…) with honesty, clarity and compassion, it evokes comparison with Jacqueline Wilson and will be read with similar commitment and need. Important conversations will ensue.

Meet the author

LUCY CATCHPOLE'S LATEST BOOK, *MAMA CAR*, IS A CELEBRATION OF A MOTHER'S WHEELCHAIR AND THE COSY COMFORT IT PROVIDES FOR HER CHILD

What inspired you to write your *Mama Car*?

The book grew directly out of my experience as a disabled mother, and my daughters' relationship with my wheelchair – which is a very lovely one. When they were little, everything with wheels was a 'car', and so my wheelchair became the 'mama car'. In real life it's adored – it doubles as a table, a tunnel, a (potentially uncomfortable) den.

Disabled parents don't pop up often in picture books, but there are lots of us out there. There's a value to seeing that experience without it being romanticised or over-dramatised; no flying wheelchairs or mountains, just normal life with a disabled parent.

How do you think teachers could use *Mama Car* in the classroom?

Disability can be hard for teachers to cover, whether as part of PSHE or as one of many protected characteristics. It's outside many people's comfort zone, and there's lots that can go wrong! Some books and resources are outdated, and focus heavily on charity. But I know teachers go to a lot of trouble to get it right, because many track down our website. Our book list and learning resources are amongst our most popular posts (**thecatchpoles.net**).

And it's important to get it right, for disabled and non-disabled pupils. The world tends to signal to children, in lots of different ways, that disabled people are either inspiring or pitiable. Reading *Mama Car* as part of storytime in EYFS and KS1 will, I hope, have the opposite effect, by showing disability as part of a very ordinary family.

Mama Car*, by Lucy Catchpole and Karen George, is out now. (Faber & Faber, £7.99)*

To space and back again – IN ONE SCHOOL DAY

Dr Nikhil Mistry explains why planetariums make perfect educational visits

As a former science teacher, I've often asked myself 'How can I make learning fun?'. At Winchester Science Centre, I finally got the answer to my question: I saw a group of children enjoying a show in our planetarium. They were engaged, asking questions and excited by the topic they were learning.

At its core, a planetarium is a theatre with a 360-degree projection dome that can be used to provide education and entertainment about astronomy. But that's the dictionary definition. I want to tell you how a planetarium is so much more than that, how it can provide a vital resource when it comes to planning a school trip, and just how absolutely awesome it is to visit one.

For many of us, especially children, it's hard to imagine what the universe is like from facts and figures alone.

I can't picture what the 151.96 million kilometres between Earth and the Sun looks like. And can you imagine a planet so big it can fit over 1,000 Earths inside?

Being inside a planetarium helps make concepts like these much easier to understand. The audience becomes immersed in the solar system and can build a real connection to it.

A visit to a planetarium provides an enhanced experience that it isn't easy to reproduce in a classroom. You'll zoom into space on a journey of discovery, flying to moons, planets and constellations, while a presenter delves into topics like why Venus is so hot, or what the giant red dot on Jupiter actually is.

> *"It's hard to imagine what the universe is like from facts and figures alone"*

I encourage my team of planetarium pilots to get children to look more closely at the celestial world above them, to ask questions and be curious. By looking at the night sky, we can highlight key constellations that children can spot when they go home. This is so important as, once pupils leave us, there are few opportunities for them to interact with space; but the night sky is an easily accessible resource. It's moments like this that I love, and which make the topic of space become relatable, excitable and easy to digest.

What if your nearest planetarium is too far away to visit, though? Well, you can hire a mobile, inflatable one! Imagine how excited your pupils would be if you turned your school lunch hall into a space portal.

A mobile planetarium is generally smaller than a fixed one. Ours fits up to 40 pupils, so if you had a full-day visit you could take around six classes on a space adventure. Just like a fixed planetarium, a 360-degree projector and planetarium expert bring space to life right in front of your pupils' eyes. The children could be learning how to spot the North Star, discovering the scale of our solar system or building cross-curriculum links by looking at ancient cultures and locational knowledge.

Intrigued? Don't book just yet – I've got some top tips for you first.

It's important you find out as much as you can about the planetarium show before you visit, so you can prepare your pupils and tailor activities in the lead up to the trip. Or why not ask the venue what content they would suggest? They may be able to create a bespoke show for your pupils that supports their current learning, or something brand new that will stretch their horizons.

I'd also recommend asking how the venue can support the accessibility and sensory needs of your group. A planetarium can be an unusual environment for children who have never experienced one before. I promise it's a magical experience that they'll remember forever, but it can also be dark and loud. Most venues will be able to help with this through pre-show familiarisation, social stories, ear defenders and tactile resources.

So, are you ready to go to space and back again? Helmets on, ignition engaged, blast off! **TP**

Dr Nikhil Mistry is head of curiosity at Winchester Science Centre

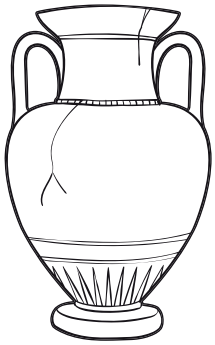
Autumn school trips

Start planning your next adventure

The Roman Baths

The Roman Baths is one of the most complete time capsules of Roman Life in Britain, bringing the past to life for young learners. Schools can enjoy self-guided visits to the site, as well as teaching sessions in the state-of-the-art Roman Baths Clore Learning Centre. The award-winning learning programme examines Roman life and culture, engineering and science. Students can also become mini archaeologists in the immersive investigation zone.

From September the new Free School Visits scheme will give free access to state-funded primary and secondary schools across the UK where 30 per cent or more of pupils receive free school meals. Visit **romanbaths.co.uk/make-a-booking**



The National Holocaust Centre and Museum

A visit to the National Holocaust Centre and Museum invites children to consider big questions relating to identity, courage and kindness, hatred, how we can think for ourselves, and more. Both primary and secondary school pupils can learn from Holocaust survivors, access museum artefacts and objects, and take part in workshops led by a team of former teachers. The workshops are age-appropriate and delivered sensitively and challengingly.

For groups unable to visit in person, it's also possible to book a session with the museum's outreach education team, wherever you are in the country.

Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-NHCM**

Relationship-building adventures: UNITE!

Bring your Year 6s together for the perfect springboard into a successful SATs year! From thrilling activities, to fun challenges, it's important for every pupil to connect, communicate and work together in the autumn term. That's why PGL's UNITE! Relationship-building adventures were developed with teachers to start the school year right. What's more, there are options to suit all budgets and 15 centres located conveniently across the UK; with 95 per cent of schools in the country within a 2-hour drive from their nearest PGL centre, a relationship-building adventure is never too far away! Visit **tinyurl.com/tp-Unite** to find out more about the awesome autumn adventure awaiting your pupils!

West Midlands Safari Park

Located in Worcestershire, West Midlands Safari Park has been welcoming educational groups for over 40 years. With its many incredible species of amazing animals, pupils can fully immerse themselves in a truly unique learning environment. In 2017, the Park's purpose-built Safari Academy opened – a sustainable, state-of-the-art education centre, dedicated to providing learning opportunities for all ages. A variety of educational sessions are on offer to complement the curriculum, delivered by an experienced education team who aim to inspire a future generation of conservationists. Prices start at £12 per child with free teacher places available too.
For more information, call **01299 404 888** or visit **www.wmsp.co.uk/school**

Mendip Activity Centre

It's time for adventure at Mendip Activity Centre. With over 30 years of experience delivering School Activity Residentials, the Mendip team helps young people make time to disconnect. Experience real adventure whilst surrounded by one of South West England's most special natural playgrounds, the Mendip Hills National Landscape. With real outdoor activities surrounding the site's unique and comfortable accommodation, this truly is the ultimate adventure destination. School residentials and school trips are available for all primary school pupils with group sizes ranging from 30 up to 300.
For more details, visit **mendip.co.uk/primary**

Bring Learning to Life

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English, art, wellbeing

Funny ways to boost wellbeing and creativity

Emily Azouelos shows how you can explore comedy and laughter in the classroom through performance

emily-azouelos-227502220

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How laughter is a tool for wellbeing and connection
- How to use images to inspire comedy writing
- Communication and public speaking skills when performing
- Different comedy styles and to think about what makes them laugh

In this lesson, children will take part in discussions about how comedy is an important tool for wellbeing. Pupils will also spend time thinking about the pitfalls that can occur when trying to make others laugh. After collecting their funniest jokes, the children will hold their own comedy show, helping develop performance techniques and teamworking skills. They'll also learn how to look for the unexpected in images and scenarios to make an audience laugh, and be encouraged to use art to create humorous characters to feature in sketches and stories.

START HERE

People say laughter is the best medicine. Discuss what the children think that means, and if they can think of real-life examples where using humour has helped them. Invite pupils to vote on whether they agree with the saying. If not, why not? Following the discussion, show two images: one that depicts people laughing *together*, and then one with a group of people laughing *at* someone. Talk about the children's reactions to the images, and pull out the differences between laughing with or laughing at people. As a class, agree how you should use comedy in the classroom. Ask pupils to write down the dos and don'ts.

MAIN LESSON

1 | COMEDY CLUB

Create a display board in the classroom, where children can stick up their favourite jokes. Encourage the class to look for jokes to share from books, TV shows, family members and friends, as well as funny pictures. From the display board, begin to pull out some comedic styles to examine further, watching age-appropriate clips online to illustrate the technique, e.g. slapstick, sketch routines, impersonations, play on words, puns, farce and parodies.

Once the children have learnt some of the comedy styles, ask them to select their favourite joke to perform aloud in front of the class, either solo or in small groups. Set up the classroom as a comedy club: 2ith the help of costumes and props, stage a comedy performance so that all pupils can share their best joke and a comedy style that they have enjoyed exploring. You could give out awards, such as the silliest costume, best use of a prop, funniest slapstick moment, most engaging performer or best example of teamwork to motivate pupils further.

2 | VISUAL CUES

Put the children into pairs and hand out a selection of printed images. Ask pairs to work together to create funny captions or dialogue for the pictures. Get them to talk about what the objects or people in the image could be thinking or doing, before brainstorming ideas and narrowing their thoughts down into a short caption or

"As a class, agree how you should use comedy in the classroom"

piece of dialogue.

Discuss how the captions or dialogue need to be short and immediately engaging for the reader. Talk to the children about how a good technique is to think about what the biggest contrast to the image might be. For example, a cute-looking kitten could have a funny caption thinking about how it would like to fight a lion. Or you could use a formal-looking picture of, for example, King Charles, and have him saying something you would never expect him to say in real life, such as "I wish we'd gone to McDonalds instead."

Another good technique is to first think about what is actually happening in the picture and then to put an absurd twist on it, thinking about what could be happening instead. For example, 'two people washing their car' could become 'two people giving their pet car a bath'.

3 | MIX AND MATCH

Put out on the tables a selection of magazines, images and drawing materials for the class. Ask the children to work in groups of three. One child in the group should draw or create a funny face from the materials supplied. They should then fold the paper over and pass it to the next person, who will create a funny body. The final person then creates funny legs and feet, and gives the character a name.

Ask the groups to unfold and reveal their new characters and work as a team to write some weird and wonderful facts about them. Encourage the children to think of absurd ideas or to play on the name or appearance of the character. For example, if the character is wearing a ballgown, why not think of an activity you would never do in a ballgown, like driving monster trucks, and make that their favourite activity?

Once all the groups have written their character profiles, get them to share and explain their creation with other groups. Can the mixed groups come up with a funny story or sketch involving two or more of their new characters to share with the class?

Emily Azouelos is a former primary teacher and leader who has moved to the world of heritage and arts-based organisations. She creates educational-related content for a variety of settings.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

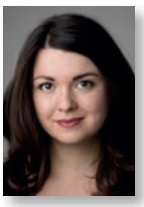
- Once the children have gained confidence in their performance styles, invite an audience to a comedy show in the classroom. This could be another class, or some parents. You could even put on a fun end-of-year show.
- Get the children to write up comedy tips based on what they have learnt about becoming comedians. What advice would they want to share and what is the best way to present the information – booklet, poster or fact files?
- Pupils could research their favourite funny authors. Can they spot which comedy tricks the authors use regularly in their books? How do the writer and illustrator combine words and pictures to make readers laugh?
- Invite a comedian or caricaturist into the school to host an assembly and share how they have made a career out of comedy and their learnings along the way.

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What would a world without comedy be like?
- How does it make you feel after you and your friends have been laughing?
- What have you enjoyed or found tricky about learning comedy?
- What comedy style have you liked the most and why?

English, Drama

Lively ways to develop new characters



© Rosalind Hobley

Sam Marsden shows how you can use a sequence of drama exercises to invigorate pupils' creative writing

@SamMarsdenDrama marsdensam.com

If you're looking to inspire your students to write creatively, drama can be used as tool to prompt ideas, develop characters and awaken imaginations. Charles Dickens is said to have acted out his characters as he wrote; when one reads his work, that's not hard to imagine, as he clearly knew his characters inside and out. Bringing drama exercises into your creative writing classroom can move pupils from staring at a blank page and onto creating powerful stories with believable characters. Letting pupils be a little silly is no bad thing either, when it comes to being creative.

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to use props as stimuli for a new story
- How to trust their intuition and story ideas
- How to use acting techniques to develop a character for creative writing
- How to use their body to portray a character

START HERE

Before any drama activity, it's a good idea to play a quick warm-up game to get everyone in the creative mindset. One fun warm-up game is a variation of musical statues. Play some music and encourage everyone to dance. Then stop the music and call out something that all the children should pretend to be a statue of. This could be, for example, a witch, banana, monkey, frog, tower, rainbow or monster. As you move on to the next activity, remind the children that drama class is a judgement-free zone, and there's no such thing as a wrong idea. Encourage pupils to observe the two rules of 'be kind' and 'good listening'.

MAIN LESSON

1 | CREATING A STORY WITH PROPS

Gather between eight and 20 props. Some of my favourites include: books, scarves, crystals, wooden spoons, snow globes, pens, handbags, pieces of jewellery, perfume bottles, pebbles, keys and magic wands. Place all the props in the centre of the room and ask students to sit in a circle around them.

Explain that one pupil at a time will be the storyteller and become any character they wish to play, for example, a witch, historian, teacher, astronaut, or singer. In character, the 'storyteller' will walk into the centre of the circle, select one prop, show this prop to the rest of the group, and tell a story about it. Ask the storyteller to think about why this prop means something to their character. For example, the witch could pick up the magic wand, explaining that his grandmother gave it to him on his eighteenth birthday. Or the astronaut might pick up the pebble and tell the group that it is a piece of moon rock, then tell a story about how frightened she was when there was a problem with one of the engines on her way back from the moon.

Explain that both short and long stories are welcome (although not too long—you might need to stop someone if their story goes on for more than two minutes!). If students are nervous, they can say just one sentence. "This is my scarf that keeps me warm in the winter" is enough. For some pupils,

> *"Charles Dickens is said to have acted out his characters as he wrote"*

delivering one sentence to the group is a big achievement.

I find that it's best to ask people to volunteer for this exercise rather than going around the circle. Try to encourage those who haven't had a turn, but never force anyone. Hopefully you'll have plenty of volunteers, and lots of story ideas will bloom in your circle.

2 | CREATING A CHARACTER WITH HOT-SEATING

Ask pupils to think of the character they just created, or a new one if they would prefer. Once the children have had a moment to think, ask them to walk around the room as this character.

Call out questions as pupils walk about: *What is your character's name? How old are they? Where do they live? Do they have a job, and/or a passion?*

Ask the children to really imagine they are that person, and picture how their character walks and holds themselves. Encourage them to show with their bodies how this looks.

Prompt them with more questions: *Does your character walk slowly, quickly, or at a medium pace? Where do they hold tension in their body? What is your character wearing?*

Continue with more questions such as: *What's your bedroom like, if you have one? Have you had any life-changing events? If so, what happened, and how did it change you? Who do you have significant relationships with? If you had three wishes, what would you wish for? What is your biggest secret?*

You might need to remind the children to answer these questions inside their heads.

Next, ask everyone to come out of character—I often say shake them off—and ask the class to sit down facing a single empty chair. This chair is the hot seat.

Ask a volunteer to sit in the hot seat in character. The audience will ask them questions, and they will answer these questions in character. The audience can ask questions you just called out, or new ones.

Explain to the person being hot-seated that if they don't know the answer, they can make something up on the spot or say "I don't know", but it's important that they stay in character.

3 | WRITING ABOUT THE NEW CHARACTERS

Once pupils have created an idea for a story with the first part of this exercise, and a character with the second part, you can also ask the children to write down a short story inspired by the ideas from this activity.

***Sam Marsden has taught drama for fifteen years in a 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.**

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- To go further with character development, you can ask the children to answer some trickier questions about their characters. These are questions that the character may not know the answers to, but the writer does:
  What does this character want subconsciously?
  What's stopping them from getting it?
  What flaws does your character have that they don't know about?
  What scares your character most of all?
- Explain to the children that the more developed a character is in, the stronger their voice will be. If the writer can really get into the character's shoes, head, and heart, it will shine through on the page.
- The children could create artworks of their characters, or scenes from their writing. Can they point out, orally, significant features in the depictions they've made of their characters or stories?

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What makes an interesting story?
- What makes an interesting character?
- Which characters from stories that you know do you find compelling, and why?

Music, English, History

Sing a song of sequences – all about our day

Judith Harries shows how to use new words, traditional tunes and simple melodic patterns to help children order events

WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- How to echo sing
- How to create a sequence
- Singing a sequence song
- Writing pentatonic patterns
- How to write a new song

Singing is good for you. Extensive research shows the benefits of singing and making music for both young children and their grown-ups. Singing together enriches social inclusion and enhances mental and physical wellbeing; it encourages mindfulness, memory and focus. This lesson includes opportunities to try simple movement sequences and echo vocal patterns using a variety of vocal sounds. Children will sing songs, using well-known tunes, to sequence events in their lives, and will have fun creating new songs using limited notes on tuned percussion.

START HERE

Introduce the word 'sequence' as a series or chain of events. Invent a movement sequence for the children to copy, such as *clap, clap, stamp, stamp (repeat)* or *stretch up high, bend down low, turn around, nice and slow (repeat)*. Try a vocal sequence using a variety of vocal sounds, such as *hum, hiss, oooh, tongue click (repeat)*. Invite children to demonstrate other vocal sounds to create a pattern. Let them use a handheld mirror to look at how their mouths move to make different sounds. Try some echo singing: Use two chime bars to pitch the notes; can the children copy or echo the two notes in different combinations?

MAIN LESSON

1 | SEQUENCE SONGS

Explain to the children that they are going to sing a song about getting ready for school in the morning. Discuss the different things they have to do each day before leaving the house. Invite them to make up mimes or actions to go with each idea. Use the tune to 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' and try these words:

This is the way I get out of bed,
Get out of bed, get out of bed.*
This is the way I get out of bed,

When I'm going to school.
*[*put on my clothes/eat my breakfast/brush my teeth/ pack my bag]*

Talk about how the song is a sequence, because it lists the actions in the correct order. Can the children think of some ideas of their own to add to the song?

Adapt the song to illustrate other sequences, such as getting ready for bed, walking to school, or going away on holiday.

Start by making a list with the children of all the things that they have to do, and then say them as a chant and fit them into the song.

2 | DAYS OF THE WEEK

Songs are also a useful way to learn fixed sequences of events such as the days of the week.

Try learning this song to the tune of 'Sing a Song of Sixpence':

Sing a song together, it helps in many ways.

> *"Songs are a useful way to learn fixed sequences of events"*

Makes you feel less worried,
brightens up your days.

Sing a song on Monday,
Tuesday, Wednesday too.
Thursday, Friday, Saturday,
keep on singing through.

[spoken] And on Sunday you
can sing some more.

Adapt the words, but use the same tune, to sing about the school day and help children to order events and be more prepared for the day ahead:

Singing in the morning, when
we take the register.
Sing a song at break time,
lining up to play.
Sing a song in literacy and
when you're doing maths.
Singing in the afternoon and
we'll have lots of laughs.

Talk about other lists that could be learned in a song or rhyme, such as months or seasons of the year, the colours of the rainbow, and the order of special days in the year. Chant the words together. A tune may emerge, or you can choose a traditional tune to use.

3 | COMPOSING SONGS

The Ofsted Subject Report on music, September 2023, praised singing provision in primary schools, but noted that the teaching of composing was a weak area. You can use the following ideas to encourage children to create their own tunes or melodies.

Provide pupils with limited notes on tuned percussion instruments. Start with two 'cuckoo' notes, G and E, as in the starting activity. Remove the other bars on the instrument if possible, so only two notes are available to start with.

Have another go at playing two-note patterns for children to copy by singing or playing. Can they make up their own patterns? Then try adding A. Let the children explore patterns using three notes. They might discover or recognise the G, G, E, A, G – E 'taunting' melody (Na, na, na, na, na, na).

Add some words such as 'When I was a baby' and develop it into a song about their personal past:

When I was a baby,
I couldn't ____

[G G E A G E, G E A E]

Now, I am [5 , 6, 7] , I've
learned to talk/run/throw/
ride

[G E A G E, G E D C]

Some children might use the whole of the pentatonic or five-note scale – C, D, E, G, A – to compose their tunes. Invite pupils to write down their patterns using the letter names. Record the tunes on a tablet so the children can listen back to their songs. Finally, challenge the children to create a melodic pattern and add their own ideas for words on a topic of their choice.

Judith Harries is an experienced early years and primary school teacher. She specialises in teaching music and drama and creates educational content for a variety of publications.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Read the poem *Now We Are Six* by A. A. Milne and challenge the children to learn it off by heart. Perform it with pairs of pupils reciting pairs of lines.
- Write your own version of the poem using this framework:

When I was one, I learned to ____

When I was two, I learned to ____ [and so on]

Now I'm five/six/seven, I can ____

- The children sing this using by repeating the first line of the melody for the pirate song, 'When I was one' (**tinyurl.com/tp-OneSong**).
- Talk to the children about their favourite toys. Do they know what their parents and grandparents played with when they were young? Make lists of 'now and then' toys. Can the children sequence different toys according to which decade people played with them most? As a class, can you make this sequence into a song?

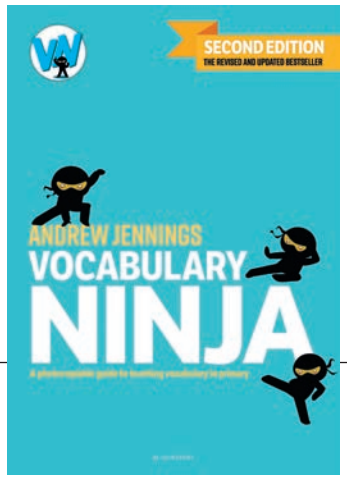
USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What is a sequence?
- Can you sort these words into a sequence: dawn, night, morning, afternoon, midday, evening?
- Can you sing or play the 'cuckoo' notes?
- What can you do now that you could not do when you were a baby?

ENGLISH

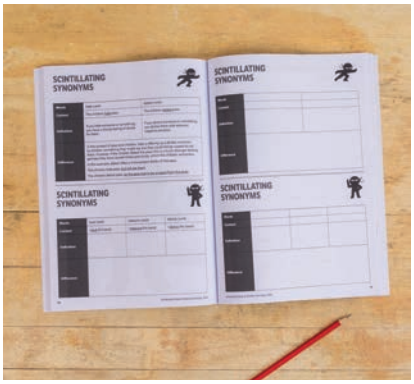
Vocabulary Ninja

A practical and comprehensive addition to your teaching arsenal



AT A GLANCE

- **An essential practical toolkit of strategies and resources to supercharge vocabulary**
- **A huge arsenal of practical ideas, lessons, games, resources, strategies and content**
- **Features theory, teaching approaches, photocopiable activities, vocabulary, etymology and phrases**
- **Built on five years of research, teaching and best practice**
- **A CPD resource bank for becoming a vocabulary grand master**



REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

The terms ninja and shinobi evoke images of mysterious, stealthy warriors, skilled in espionage, guerrilla warfare, and assassinations. What they might not be associated with is the teaching and learning of vocabulary and promoting the power of words in primary schools. But in *Vocabulary Ninja*, this is precisely what the deal is: you, the teacher become the ninja and your pupils are your grasshoppers.

This resource is your guide to developing the ninja mentality and for making vocabulary the frontline force of every interaction and every lesson you have. What the book provides is a plethora of evidence, practical strategies, pearls of wisdom, mantras, engaging games, resources and advice on how to bring words to life. These all tap into incidental learning, explicit instruction, and independent strategy development. It also provokes us to do better and go that bit further to improve the size and depth of learners' vocabulary, support their language development and foster their cognitive abilities and critical thinking.

This is where the author talks about marginal gains, micro-ambitions and micro-successes and building vocabulary through little wins throughout the day and not wasting a single moment. It's about getting pupils interested in playing with words and language, having an interest and awareness of words and providing rich opportunities for elaborating word knowledge, fluency and confidence by 'bringing the rain'. As the author notes, 'You need to be the cumulonimbus cloud that pours down onto your pupils' shallow word pool, making it a little deeper in each moment and understanding that every raindrop matters.' At the heart of the book is the idea of improving children's word health to ultimately support them become better readers, writers and communicators through an enriched diet of high-quality language. It does this through simplifying any teaching processes while amplifying the outcomes for learners.

Part one of this stellar resource is devoted to 'the way of the vocabulary ninja' and developing a ninja mindset with some brilliant chapters covering the value of vocabulary, tiers of vocabulary, early vocabulary development in the EYFS, taught vs encountered vocabulary, explicit vocabulary teaching, the vocabulary environment and improving writing standards. These are written in a very easy-going and informal style and reading the words feels like the author is having a comfortable chat with you. The chapters in themselves are a masterclass in how to get your message across and will help inform and inspire any CPD sessions.

The second part of the book is packed with the actual kit and kaboodle and this includes a range of tried and tested teaching resources designed to bring vocabulary to life. Examples of the activities include word of the day, enthralling etymology, scintillating synonyms, adventurous alternatives, vocabulary laboratory and plenty more besides. A concluding section includes additional resources featuring websites and answers to activities. You might not be a walking dictionary, but you could well be a walking ninja in a state of readiness to increase the value of every opportunity the school day opens for supercharging vocabulary. This resource will get you to that point, ready to excel.

Vocabulary Ninja is characterised by its vibrant and nurturing content that cultivates a love for learning vocabulary and lays the groundwork for helping grasshoppers take some significant intellectual leaps that will produce educationally significant improvements in their language skills.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **Builds teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about teaching vocabulary**
- ✔ **Promotes language growth and upgrades the role of vocabulary**
- ✔ **Help teachers promote word learning across the school day**
- ✔ **Fosters word consciousness and tackles word deprivation head-on**
- ✔ **Perfect for modelling and scaffolding writing**
- ✔ **Inspires and makes learning vocabulary memorable**

UPGRADE IF...

...you are looking to implement a whole-school literacy system and vocabulary-rich environment that will make a significant impact on pupil confidence, oracy and academic outcomes.

£24.99 per year | tinyurl.com/tp-VocabularyNinja

MUSIC

Secret Angels & Hay Bale Hotel

Two magical, musical nativity shows with editable scripts and original songs

AWARD-WINNING THE SCHOOL MUSICALS CO SCHOOL MUSICALS

AT A GLANCE

- **Comprehensive booklets providing editable scripts, song lyrics and music**
- **Includes detailed staging notes**
- **CD/downloadable audio files featuring vocal and non-vocal versions of each song**
- **Entertaining adaptations of the Christmas story**
- **Sing-along backing and vocal videos**

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

Just like the appearance of festive displays in shops in September, the beginning of a new school year comes with the stark reminder that Christmas is coming, and you'll be expected to put on a nativity-based show by the end of term. Now, you might be an ardent Christmas enthusiast – one who delights in every sparkle and song – but there are also those who see it as another thing to add to the endless list of teacher tasks. Either way, you'll be rejoicing at the prospect of getting your hands on a nativity show that takes the effort out of the whole business.

The School Musicals Company has released two new shows: *Secret Angels* for four-to-seven-year-olds, and *Hay Bale Hotel* for five-to-nine-year-olds. As those who have put on their shows before will expect, both come with everything you need for a stress-free, successful production.

Written by Niki Davies, *Secret Angels* imagines a section of the heavenly host as a special-ops squad charged with covertly facilitating the key moments in the nativity story. Need a star to follow? They'll buff one up for you. Innkeeper liable to forget that his stable can double up as a maternity suite? They'll have a quiet word in his shell-like. However, they forget to tell the shepherds and have to rush back to Bethlehem to give them the news. In their haste, they fail to put on their disguises, and appear in all their blinding glory to the shocked flock-watchers.

Hay Bale Hotel approaches the story from the perspective of Bethlehem's animals. Written by Tom Kirkham and Matthew Crossey, it portrays the them as reacting to the census with greater foresight than the human population. Worried that there won't be enough accommodation for the expected influx of people, they decide to establish their own hotel, furnished with hay bales. No prizes for guessing who arrives as their first and only guest family. And, of course, they play host to other special visitors: the shepherds and the three wise men.

Appropriately enough, given the slightly younger pitch of the piece, *Secret Angels* has a simple, comparatively direct script that relies on the cuteness of the cast to please the crowd. *Hay Bale Hotel* is a bit more of a romp with the sort of groan-worthy jokes that will put a smile on everybody's face and get them in training for Christmas cracker gags.

"Everything you need for a stress-free, successful production"

As for the songs, Niki Davies has once again managed, in *Secret Angels*, to hit that sweet spot where simplicity, brevity and catchiness converge. I particularly liked 'Shine Shine Golden Star'. *Hay Bale Hotel* also offers a charming collection of ditties. Of course, the suggested age-range is that little bit older but, even so, you may need to schedule serious rehearsal time to get everything right, as some songs really pack in the lyrics. Nevertheless, 'On Christmas Day' is a real good-cheer showstopper that should leave the audience with a warm and festive glow. And, after all is sung and done, that's what these performances are about, isn't it?

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **Well-pitched scripts**
- ✔ **Charming, catchy songs**
- ✔ **Speaking parts for over 30 children**
- ✔ **Detailed guidance notes**
- ✔ **Reduces the stress of staging production**

UPGRADE IF...

...you want to put on enchanting, crowd-pleasing nativity-based shows without losing sleep over them.

£26.95 RRP per show for the booklet and CD (or downloads) plus £26.00 performance licence | theschoolmusicalscompany.com

ENGLISH, HISTORY

The Time-travelling Trio

Collins BIG CAT

An inspiring collection of historical adventures with an emphasis on diversity

AT A GLANCE

- **A range of engaging stories that reflects the diversity of our communities.**
- **Appealingly and sensitively written and illustrated.**
- **Covers a range of reading levels.**
- **Features a range of people, places and periods of historical interest.**
- **Includes useful teaching tips and historical information.**

REVIEWED BY: MIKE DAVIES

What makes you want to pick up a book and read it? There could be any number of factors – an intriguing title, a familiar author, an eye-catching illustration. But one way to make sure that children turn away from the shelves is if they are confronted with rows and rows of faces that look nothing like them.

Children can be taught to read. However, it is the love of reading that really matters when it comes to driving progress and realising potential. Therefore, it's essential that pupils are presented in their school libraries with a variety of books that reflects the diversity within their community.

A significant proportion of the Collins Big Cat catalogue has been designed to highlight and celebrate the experiences of people from a range of ethnic backgrounds. In the wrong hands, this process could be fraught with pitfalls, no matter how good the intentions. However, Collins have taken great care to establish a community of excellent authors and illustrators and sensitively paired them to ensure authenticity.

This particular selection of titles, penned by Nadine Cowan, concerns the adventures of Aniyah, EJ and Olivia, the Time-travelling Trio. Whenever they roll a double three or double six on their Ludi board game – an old, family heirloom – they are magicked away to a different period in history. While the basic device of having an object as a time-travelling portal might seem fairly familiar, I did like the diversity that was reflected in the choice of destinations and focal characters.

Obviously, the national curriculum has tried over recent years and decades to make primary school history less 'white' and it was good to see this reflected in these adventures. For example, The Warrior Queen sees the trio travelling back to the Benin Empire in the early 16th century. No prizes for guessing where The Storm and the Samurai takes them.

It was the choice of key characters that really grabbed my attention, though. From royal trumpeters to free divers, to heroes of the Windrush generation, these books are bursting with wonderous stories of genuine figures from history. Best of all, each tale is told in an inspiringly positive way with fascinating historical details whilst still making the narrative resonate with children today.

There are handy teaching tips for helping children to get the most from the reading experience. For those of us whose historical knowledge is less than encyclopaedic, there is also a section at the back giving key facts about the people and places featured in each title. Most importantly, though, these are books to enjoy. The stories are appropriately pitched for the age group, charmingly told and nicely illustrated. They would be a very positive addition to any school collection.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ Enjoyable, well-pitched stories
- ✔ Historically informative
- ✔ Inclusive and representative
- ✔ Understatedly inspirational
- ✔ A positive addition to any school library

UPGRADE IF...

... you want to foster a more inclusive love of reading by broadening the relatability of your school's historical fiction collection.

From £7.00 | tinyurl.com/tp-CollinsTrio

MUSIC, DRAMA

Out of the Ark

The Fleece Force: An arresting nativity

AT A GLANCE

- **A new blockbuster nativity from the award-winning Out of the Ark stable**
- **Teacher's book containing everything you need for staging a showstopper**
- **An online Words on Screen™ product to stream or download**
- **Seven tried-and-tested songs full of humour, colour and vitality**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

Out of the Ark know how to produce joyful, creative, energetic resources. It's in their musical DNA.

For many pupils, Out of the Ark resources have become the soundtrack of their childhood in school featuring in various assemblies, musicals, choirs and nativities. And for good reasons too – they are blue-ribbon resources that are polished and professional, with a real passion for singing.

Their latest resource is a nativity one and it had me giggling right from the off. The Fleece Force is, as the name suggests, is a bit of a woolly caper from another eweniverse and shear madness in places, but don't worry, all's wool that ends wool, culminating in peace, hope and love.

Here's the situation: so many people have flocked to Bethlehem, The Fleece Force are trying to keep the peace and make sure no one ends up behind baaa-rs.

Newbie Constable Woolly has her work cut out only letting people into Bethlehem that are on the census, but this proves to be difficult with shepherds, three kings and angels on high arriving.

Aiding and abetting her is the rather woolly-headed Constable Jumper, a colleague with an unconventional approach to police work who manages to get everyone safely to the stable including Mary, Joseph and the donkey!

The editable script for this nativity is very witty and communicates the Christmas story in an entirely fun and engaging way without losing the inherent sense of wonder embodied in the original tale.

Whilst this might not appeal to those that prefer a traditional re-telling, there is little doubt that this is a very creative and novel narrative that keeps the core storyline in a way that hasn't been done before. It's actually a fantastic way to teach and remember the biblical story, and children will love performing it as not only a religious concert but a cultural one too as it fosters a lovely sense of school community.

Okay, so the resource might not have Lady Baa Baa, Britney Shears or Ed Shearan on vocals but what it does have is the rather marvellous singing from school children who always hit the right note all supported by expertly crafted words, music and backing tracks.

As always, the cast list suggestion is perfect for all sheeps and sizes with 30 speaking parts that can be edited according to your own context. There is the simplest of staging and minimal props with a suggested generic 'Bethlehem skyline' backdrop with lots of ideas given for costumes.

A staple of UK primary school culture and one of our most cherished traditions, the annual nativity is a defining moment for a school and its children which is why considerable thought needs to be devoted to each and every one staged. Well, The Fleece Force deserves centre stage as it is a fantastically baarmy resource full of shear brilliance.

This is a happy and inclusive nativity that lets the biblical story speak in a new, fresh and exciting way and gives the children an enriching and positive experience that delivers an unequalled opportunity for school synergy.

At its heart is super music and really great singing embedded in a fun-loving and high-quality retelling that maximises participation and engagement for all. There is a real richness, diversity and relevance to it with very high production values.

A nativity is a whole class production with many moving parts that needs careful coordination which is why I'd be confident in choosing this resource to help me stage the biggest ticket of year. It is another compositional masterpiece from Out of the Ark.

Fleece Navidad!

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **A really imaginative, heart-warming and comical nativity**
- ✔ **A gripping script, flexible roles and fun songs**
- ✔ **Tip-top musical composition**
- ✔ **Fosters pupil wellbeing, inclusion and togetherness**
- ✔ **Builds teamwork and friendship**
- ✔ **Provides diverse opportunities for creativity**
- ✔ **Increases the awareness of the value of active music-making and singing**

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking for a fun-filled and 'up-bleat' nativity that tells the traditional Christmas story in a ewe-nique way.

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ENGLISH

The Five Minute Box

A practical and comprehensive addition to your teaching arsenal

AT A GLANCE

- **A structured multi-sensory phonics programme and screening tool for potential Specific Learning Difficulties**
- **Designed to be delivered by teaching assistants**
- **Covers the first stages of phonics**
- **Supplements class teaching**
- **Gives children ownership of their own learning**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

When it comes to literacy interventions, what matters the most is how well pupils are targeted, assessed, and monitored within the framework of a particular programme. Although there can never be a single universally effective programme, some interventions do manage to work effectively for a sizeable number of pupils. One such literacy intervention is the recently updated Five Minute Box, a proven system for teaching early literacy skills providing high quality phonic work to ease reading difficulties.

This is really a sturdy, plastic valise of practical literacy resources packed together to help with confidence, reduce anxiety and help pupils to keep up and master early literacy. It's an easy-to-use and practical toolkit that is designed for direct 1:1 support for 'at risk' children with the aim of helping them improve their knowledge, understanding and attainment. As it is intended for individual tuition, children don't have to worry about group dynamics or the fear of failure in front of their peers. It's especially useful for helping children with dyslexia, developmental language disorder and social and emotional needs and allows for progress to be made at different rates.

What makes the Five Minute Box so good to use is that it is geared up for explicit and systematic teaching delivered in brief, but intensive, structured interventions. This means it provides clear models for positive and supportive learning using an array of examples proven to teach reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and literacy skills. Inside the case you get a newly updated 39-page resource book containing all you need to know about the box and how to get the most out of it. This includes the benefits and key points, initial assessments, teaching sessions, lesson plans, structured reading and spelling programme, and further assessments.

Also in the case you will find all of the hands-on materials you need for each lesson, including magnetic alphabet letters, sounds board, keyword cards and boards, handwriting formation board, record of achievement forms, record of work sheets, whiteboard and pen. As the materials are in one place, this helps save any preparation time and maximises time for actual teaching. There's a very handy fold-out instruction guide as well, which condenses the key information into easily digestible sections. The resource itself requires little in the way of preparation apart from familiarising yourself with the lesson plans and materials, so this is very much an 'open the box and get started' resource. Affordable training is also available if staff require it. Lessons are taught in small chunks, and each session covers a sounds board, keyword cards and personal information. The lesson plans included are all clearly set out in a step-by-step format using a 'Hear it, Say it, Read it, Write it, Read it again' approach. There are activities in phonics, keyword reading, spelling and writing and the box is intended for use in class rather than taking children out.

The Five Minute Box is not a box of tricks. It's a structured intervention toolkit of child-focused activities that allows all learners acquire secure phonic knowledge and literacy skills via short and impactful lessons that focus their attention and keep them involved. An intervention doesn't have to take hours to be effective, and The Five Minute Box proves that early intervention in short, focused bursts can really accelerate children's catch-up growth and be a rewarding not overwhelming experience.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **Ideal support for dyslexic or second-language learners**
- ✔ **Gives pupils the phonic skills and confidence they need to succeed**
- ✔ **Gives pupils multisensory support to learn new strategies and skills**
- ✔ **Provides chances to think aloud and talk about their learning and decisions**
- ✔ **Provides pupils with extensive feedback, self-esteem, motivation to learn and self-help strategies**
- ✔ **Provides valuable data and easy to monitor by SENCo**

UPGRADE IF...

...you are looking for a highly effective early intervention and screening tool that identifies strengths and gaps in learning, engages children, supports their independent learning and gives an accurate record of progress.

£115 | fiveminutebox.co.uk

HANDWRITING

STABILO EASYoriginal pens & EASYgraph S pencils

Ergonomic pens and pencils developed by experts specifically for both left- and right-handed children

AT A GLANCE

- **Skilfully designed pens and pencils based on ergonomic principles in penmanship**
- **Left- and right-handed versions**
- **Focused on comfort and efficiency**
- **Tested by expert scientists**
- **Pencil wood is sourced from responsibly-managed forests**

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL

How much do we think about handedness when we consider children's needs? Handedness is the preference for using one hand over another and when it comes to the school environment this really matters.

Left-handed children often struggle when the resources aren't there to support them. This is often the case when it comes to writing utensils and scissors. Left-handed pupils can often appear uncoordinated or disorganised as most equipment is set up for right-handed children.

STABILO has thought long and hard about the user experience to cater for everyone and its product range is impressively inclusive. Every operational characteristic has been considered from the size, weight, shape and length of the instrument to the surface texture and hardness of the shaft, ink flow, smoothness, writing fatigue and more.

The EASY Start range is a vibrant and ergonomic family of writing equipment specifically designed for learning and improving handwriting skills at a young age. Led by the latest research in handwriting ergonomics, these are clever products that put writing comfort, legibility, efficiency and motivation right at the centre of design so that children can have fun improving their skills.

STABILO's EASYorginal pens are a joy. These really attractive wide-barrel refillable pens have been ergonomically moulded so that children use the lightest grip possible while writing. The slightly arched shape helps pupils to achieve the recommended tripod grip, eliminating strain. It also features a rubberised grip around the pen barrel for increased traction.

The STABILO ergonomic pens use a rollerball design which flows freely. This helps reduce writing pressure which can lead to pain over longer pieces of written work. The nibs are broad and flexible and use royal blue erasable ink, ideal for school use.

STABILO's handwriting pencils with break-resistant 2.2mm lead have also been designed specifically for left- and right-handers. EASYgraph S pencils have a brilliant triangular design and non-slip grip moulds which magnificently support a relaxed hand posture. They also have a subtle yellow and red colour coding at the end of the pencil to indicate whether it is a left- or right-handed version.

They come in a range of five shaft colours and the S (slim) versions have a slenderer barrel than the original, but still with a space for inscribing your name.

Every child should benefit from adopting an ergonomic way of working and STABILO has given us the tools to work in a more efficient and child-friendly way. These are writing resources that truly break the mould.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- ✔ **Sophisticated, intelligent and intuitive designs to tackle handwriting issues**
- ✔ **Non-slip, comfortable to hold and prevents stress, tiredness and potential damage to hand posture**
- ✔ **Revolutionary, fun and attractive designs**
- ✔ **Quality through and through for a great price**
- ✔ **Takes the stress out of handwriting**

UPGRADE IF...

...you are looking for writing resources that truly cater for left-, right- and mixed-handers.

Pens from £3.29, pencils from £1.04, stabilo.com/uk

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?

Having children completely engaged in their activity. Those times when everyone gets on board with the lesson, and shows a real interest, are really special. If children are not enjoying their time with you, they won't gain any real benefit; but it's not always easy to get everyone on board. Every now and again though, you get to witness one of those light bulb moments; something just falls into place. Or you might have just one particular pupil who never really engages with the class and they start to show a real interest. Maybe they suddenly find just enough confidence to participate with their group, and finally feel their ideas and suggestions are heard and appreciated. This can turn everything around for them.

2 What is your greatest fear at work?

To have children say they're bored. I put a lot of effort into making my teaching time interesting, and know from experience that once you lose the class energy it can be difficult to bring it back.

3 What is your current state of mind?

Inspired. I'm about to start work on a poetry workshop with a Year 5 group and have been looking at all the places we find poetry, such as song lyrics, advertising jingles and rhyming story books. I still get excited by it all.

4 What do you consider the most overrated teacher virtue?

To hold curriculum above everything else. Although access to an education is a truly marvelous thing, which when fully utilised can change a person's life forever, kindness should always be both considered and taught as the most important quality anyone can have, and should be prioritised in the teaching profession. To show compassion, never to bully or make fun of others, and to always think of other people's feelings are the most important things we can teach children. Imagine a world where kindness was prioritised over SATs results.

5 On what occasion do you lie to your class?

When I say I tried really hard when I was in school!

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

Probably, "Today we're going to do something really great." It doesn't work if you say it at the beginning of every lesson. And, "Can you please not talk when I'm talking. It's very rude."

"Imagine a world where kindness was prioritised over SATs results"

7 What do you consider your greatest teaching achievement?

Our end-of-year production of *A Christmas Carol*. There was a really bad bug going around and lots of performers – including two Scrooges – had to drop out. We had to muddle our way through as best we could and hope our authentic costumes would carry the production. In the end, it was a great production and everyone involved had so much fun. We turned all the chaos into an exciting time. There was a real sense of achievement and camaraderie in managing to pull it off.

8 What is your most treasured teaching possession?

My prop box. I run lots of drama classes, but this is also great for creative writing. It's just lots of objects in a big cardboard box, a very eclectic mix. There's a very battered old-fashioned telephone, a plastic vase, a hair dryer, a handbag etc., lots of old things that are great for kick-starting story ideas; pick three items and use these as the basis for a story, or ideas for small group drama improvisations – loads of fun! **TP**

NAME: Karen Hart
JOB ROLE: Drama and literacy specialist, author and freelance journalist
EXTRA INFO: Author of *Faiths and Festivals Book 2* (Practical Pre-school Books, £19.99)

Karen.Journalist


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