



SESSION 7 - TEACHING NOTES - Skyship Adventure 3 – focus on character: Thursday 4th March 2020 1.30 – 2.30 am

It would be great for these narrative sessions, if you could read Vashti Hardy's book *Brightstorm* to the class over the next few weeks.

Creative Game

As usual, the show begins with a game for children to play. Make sure that they have their notebooks and pencils ready and listen carefully. The game does NOT involve using the padlet. The games can be played in pairs or solo, as a group or class. Get everyone to make notes as Pie and David play the game. Then there will be a pause of a few minutes – a 'timer' will be onscreen giving a countdown. The teacher settles the class to having a go at playing the games. The idea of the games is to get everyone involved and buzzing with ideas, warming up the language and creative thought before going onto tucking into the main course! It is worth noting that sometimes the games can be written up later as whole pieces of writing. They should gather all their ideas in one notebook so that this becomes a store of language and ideas that can be drawn upon when writing. Children at home either play with a sibling or parent or write ideas rapidly in their notebooks.

Today's Game – 'storytelling warm up'

Warm up the imagination and get ideas buzzing with this creative starter. The challenge is to bounce a story back and forth with a partner, being fed a word to use.

So partner A makes up a story sentence by sentence. After each sentence, partner B feeds in a word **that just will not fit**.

Partner A has to make up the next sentence using that word, e.g.

Partner A - Once upon a time there was a knight who lived in a castle.

Partner B - Carrots.

Partner A - Early one morning he went out to dig up some carrots.

Partner B - cheese grater

Partner A - After an hour, he took the carrots inside and used a cheese grater to shred them.

Partner B - tarmac

Partner A - As he was cooking, he noticed a stranger on the tarmac outside...

At halftime, swap roles. The game can be played the other way round with partner B feeding in a word **that they think will fit in.** This could be played in pairs, threes or as a class together. The children will be given a set time limit to play the game. If they dry up then they could start again. **Children on their own could choose a word at random from a book by taking the first word on the page of a book.** David and Pie will model the game first.

The Objective – to enjoy the creative challenge of inventing a story using random ingredients.

Children's Audio – encourage children to listen carefully to the reading as it was chosen because it was well written but also because it was read aloud effectively. Later on, get the class to discuss why they think the reading was chosen.

The Objective – to listen attentively, enjoy and reflect on what makes effective writing and performance.

Gallery Challenge – This week there are potentially two art challenges:

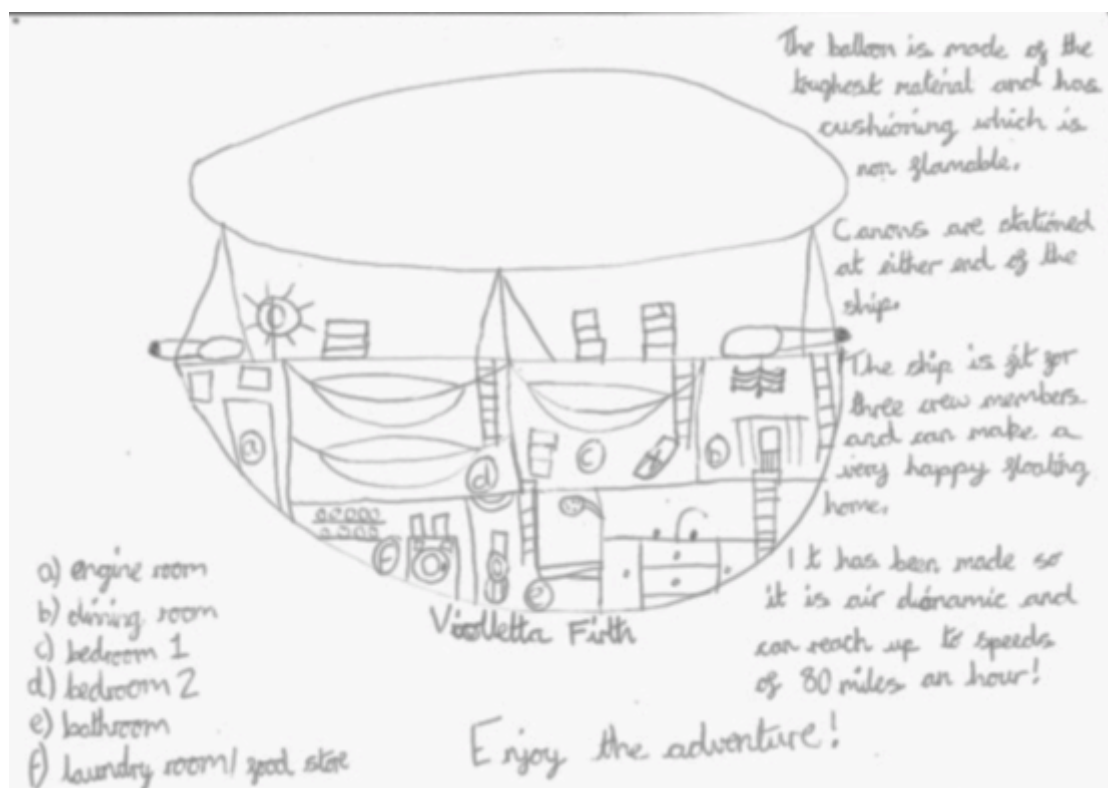
- a. To draw, paint or make a skyship.
- b. To draw a storyworld map

a. Skyship Art

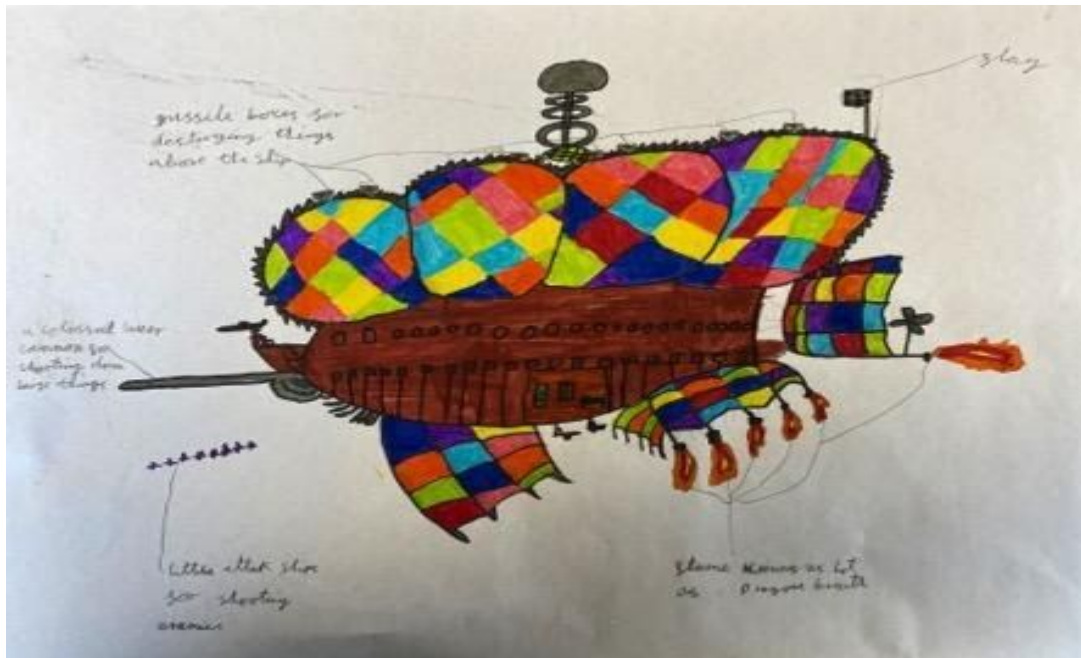
Resources and ideas can be found on Vashti Hardy's website:

<https://www.vashtihardy.com/bookresources>

A good example of a labeled skyship drawing by Georgia.



Labeled and coloured carefully with an eye for a bold pattern by Ronnie.



A wonderful painting by George plus his model skyship.

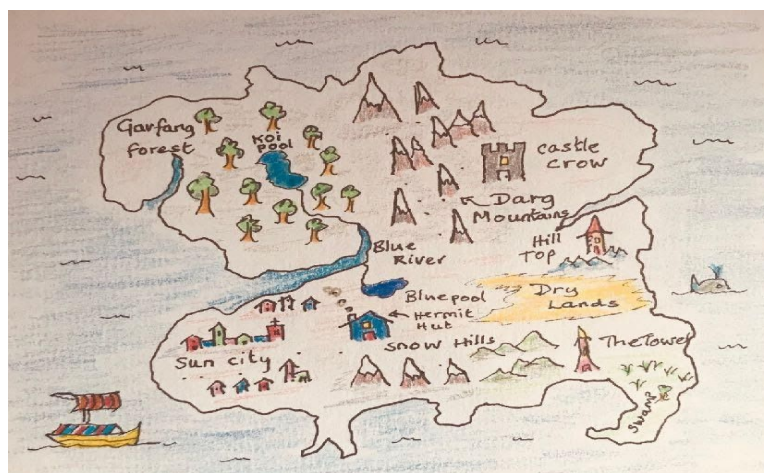




b. Draw a storyworld map for a skyship adventure.

One of my favourite things about reading children's books is when you find a map right at the beginning showing the landscape of the story. I thought it would be a great idea for the children to design and draw their own map showing the journey of the skyship and where it lands. Check out on the internet to see how Kieran Larwood, author of *Podkin One-Ear*, draws maps of his story worlds:

<https://www.kmlarwood.com/resources/>



Padlet – Make sure that your children work on your school's allocated padlet. Children have a few minutes to complete one or more 'post it notes' to create sentences that build character. They should innovate on the 'empty' sentence model that has been provided below. To do this, they should think about who the character might be (name it) and how they feel – so if 'tired', the character might 'slouch' but if happy, the character could 'skip'. The sentence should be extended suggesting what the character is thinking or feeling (using an 'ing' verb). Here is the empty sentence to work with:

The boy went into the room, thinking about things.

Pie will model several ideas, e.g.

Ollie barged into the professor's study, wondering where the map had been hidden.

Tulip slipped into the Capitol Cinema, knowing that the gang was close behind her.

These verbs will help children extend their ideas and could be displayed or available in a handout:

thinking wondering hoping wishing expecting	feeling sensing knowing regretting dreaming
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Remind children about what they have been learning so far.
This might make a useful poster:

- Use accurate punctuation.
 - Use concrete images and describe details.
 - Use your senses - what you saw, heard, etc.
 - Each word earns its place.
 - No overwriting.
 - Alliteration, similes and metaphors to build pictures.
 - Personification to add atmosphere – the wind moans.
 - Name it – ‘Mr Jabbers’ not ‘the man’; ‘Kings Street’ not ‘the road’.
-
- If you have a very young class or reluctant writers who lack confidence, ideas could be co-constructed in pairs or as a class and posted by the teacher.
 - Remind children and adults to use refresh button at the top of the page so that they can see their post-it note appear – as each note is moderated, they will not all appear during the session but will appear later once moderated.

The Objective – to write a variety of descriptive sentences that introduce a character, showing what they are doing and suggesting how they think.

Jotcast activity – Character

This is aimed at encouraging children to think about using contrasting characters in their writing and to consider how writers make characters sound real and how to build characterisation. **There are two images of different characters’ faces - an old lady and a young boy.**



This sort of activity is very useful as a precursor to writing. The children have to imagine how a character feels and then think about how they would move or what they might do. There are two images so that children can be thinking about how they would be creating two contrasting characters. If they write with

two contrasting characters, there will almost inevitably be conflict or tension.

The challenge is to write sentences that follow the same pattern, dropping information about physical appearance into the sentence using a relative clause. **The texts below could be displayed or provided on a handout:**

- a. Name your character.
- b. Drop in a little physical description.
- c. Think about how your characters feels, e.g.

happy	scared
brave	sad
bold	lonely
bossy	angry
kind	shy

Name	Ben
Description	whose hair sprouted in flaming curls
Feeling	glared at the owl as it spoke.

Ben, whose hair sprouted in flaming curls, glared at the owl as it spoke.

Name	Mrs Majieka
Description	whose skin wrinkled like a ploughed field
Feeling	sighed as the snow fell.

Mrs Majeika, whose skin wrinkled like a ploughed field, sighed as the snow fell.

Encourage the children to listen to any advice that Pie gives during this session and to act on it. It might be worth jotting any useful writing tips down. For instance, you make a character seem real by thinking about how a character feels and then showing this through what they do. Writing tips could be made into writing posters or written in their journals. The activity is to use an image of character, think about how they feel and then show this through what they do, dropping in a touch of description.

Encourage the children to listen to any advice that Pie gives during this session and to act on it. It might be worth jotting any useful writing tips down on the flipchart. For instance, *name it, draw on your senses so that the reader can imagine the scene, reread to make ideas flow, create fresh images not clichés, say it aloud, choose words with care, avoid repeating words, reread to police your sentences, pretend you are your teacher....* Writing tips could be made into writing posters or written in their journals.

Objective – begin to build a character through ‘name it’, dropping in description with a relative clause and tagging on an action, possibly hinting at how they feel.

Blogging Activity – Write the next section for your skyship adventure, developing two contrasting main characters.

Write a scene suggesting how characters feel through their behavior – use Pie’s main paragraph as a model for their writing but allow them freedom to draw on their other reading so that the model is in no way restrictive. **Ideally, the children**

should have a copy of the next part of Pie's story so that they can see the way in which he builds the characters.

- a. Name your character.
- b. Use a little physical description.
- c. Think about how the character feels.
- d. Show this through how they move, e.g. tiptoed or charged.

Objective – learning to create contrasting characters, make characters sound real and using show and not tell.

Type of Writing – adventure story

Audio Challenge – If children want to record their own blog ensure that they have read it aloud a number of times. They should read it slowly and clearly with expression. This could be worked on in pairs or threes so that children can develop their performance.

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Stargrazer contd

Twenty minutes later, the children found themselves alone on board the Stargrazer. Captain O'Shea and the crew had already left in search of materials to mend the balloon, leaving strict instructions that the children should not leave the ship. Ty and Mariana stood on deck, staring into the encroaching darkness. A few stars had appeared and a purple moon glowed above them.

At that moment, they heard something.

Episode 3 - 'New Crew Member'

Some thing was crawling up the side of the skyship's wooden hull. Ty, whose face paled, shrank back and ducked down behind the tiller but Mariana rushed to the edge and peered into the gloom below. She could just make out something or somebody scrabbling up the side of the ship. It was quite small and had green eyes. It paused and stared back up at her. "It's a baby dragon," she called, "and its hurt." Mariana, whose brow frowned with concentration, reached down to grip its outstretched paw and pulled it onto the deck. "It must have got hurt in the storm."

The dragonlet was shivering with cold and whimpering. Ty dashed off to fetch a ship's blanket.

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You might want to use this text as a starter to set the scene:

News Interview

‘Good evening. We are delighted to say that we have made contact with Mariana and Ty from the airship Stargrazer. This link up is brought to you by ‘AirScribe News’. How are you both?’

‘The journey started well but then we flew into a terrible storm. I was terrified. The airship was attacked by some sort of savage bird that was larger than an albatross. It had ragged wings, a massive beak and tore at the balloon with razor-sharp talons. There was sudden jolt and we were spiraling down. I held on for dear life but imagined that would be it for us.’

‘I see, that sounds awful. Mariana how are you faring?’

‘It’s been amazing. I managed to fight off the lightning bird with a sky grappling iron as we zoomed down into the ruined city. The balloon has an enormous tear in it and we don’t have enough spare hide to mend it so Captain O’Halligan, she’s truly amazing, has gone off with the crew to see what they can find and we are sorting the airship out. It’s been the best adventure ever. Once we are flying again we will be...dfee...wefef.....efewf’

‘Oh dear, we seem to have lost them. More on that story tomorrow. Now, it’s over to Leanne for the Weather report...’

Making characters seem real

Probably the major building block of all narrative has to be the characters. Careful reading of books with well-defined characters can help children begin to build a sense of how to create real characters so that they live on the page and in the reader's mind. For a character to live in the reader's mind, it probably has to be real in the writer's mind. It can help to collect the names of characters from books or real life and store these. Add in invented names (Skater, Mrs Winterberry, Miss Savage). Sometimes a name can suggest something about the character. For instance, to me the name 'Scrooge' sounds scrunched up and mean. Roald Dahl was good at choosing names that already told the reader something about the characters, e.g. Boggis, Bunce and Bean!

Writers usually don't spend too much time describing a character. One or two descriptive details that suggest something about the person are sufficient. One handy trick is to notice how writers often drop pieces of information into a sentence to show the reader what a character looks like.

*The woman, **dressed in a scarlet cat suit**, wandered across the stage.*

Children could practise dropping descriptions into sentences in a similar vein.

*The girl, **wearing an old overcoat**, ran into the shop.*
*Bryony, **dressed in her school uniform**, slouched on the sofa.*

They could then rehearse the idea of dropping into the sentence a description of what the character is doing.

*The policeman, **twiddling his thumbs**, waited on the street corner.*

*The teacher, **tapping his foot impatiently**, glared at the class.*

Notice how the sentence about the teacher really suggests a lot about how he is feeling. Ask children to scan their reading books and find sentences in which the reader is shown what the character feels or thinks by what they are doing (*he kicked the table leg*), saying (*“Go away!”*) or thinking (*Not for the first time, he wondered why he felt so angry with them all*).

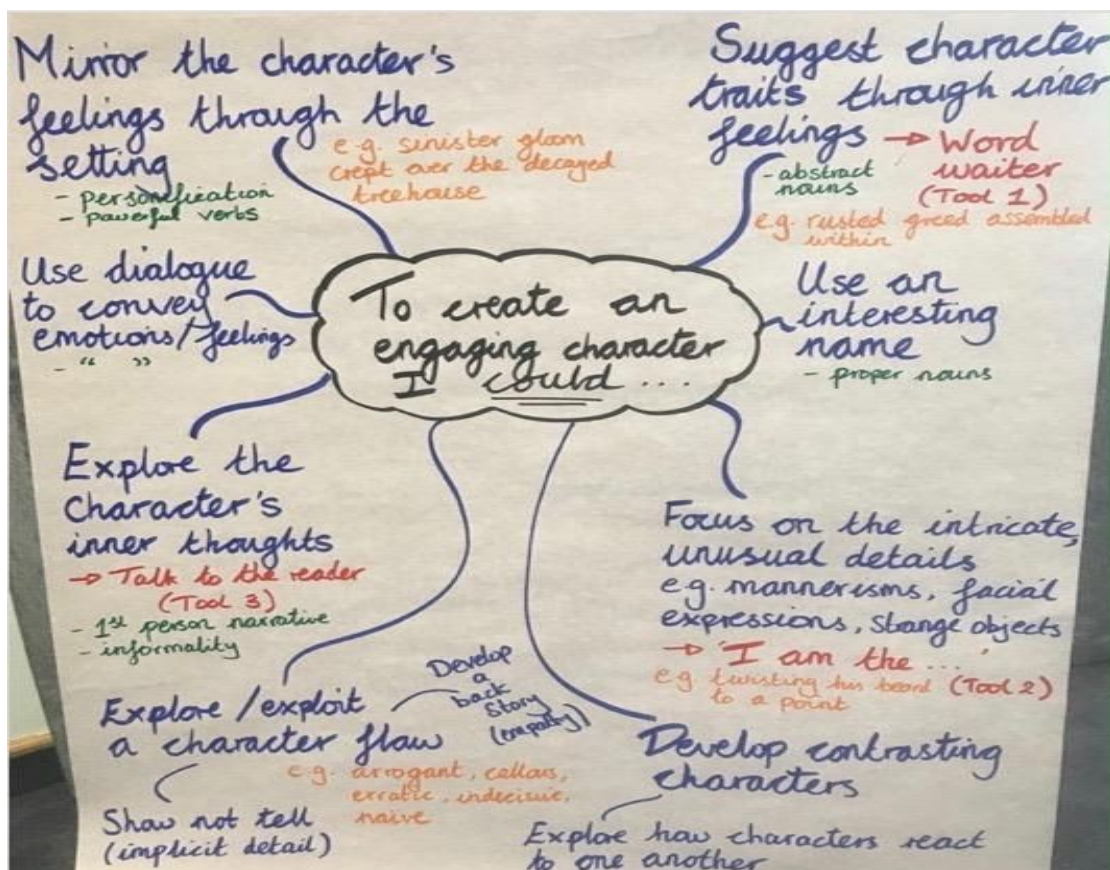
The key aspect about characterisation is for the writer to have a clear view about how their character feels or the sort of person that they are – *a bully, kindly, generous, greedy, angry...* This then influences what the character will say, do and think. It can also help to use detail and reveal what the character is thinking.

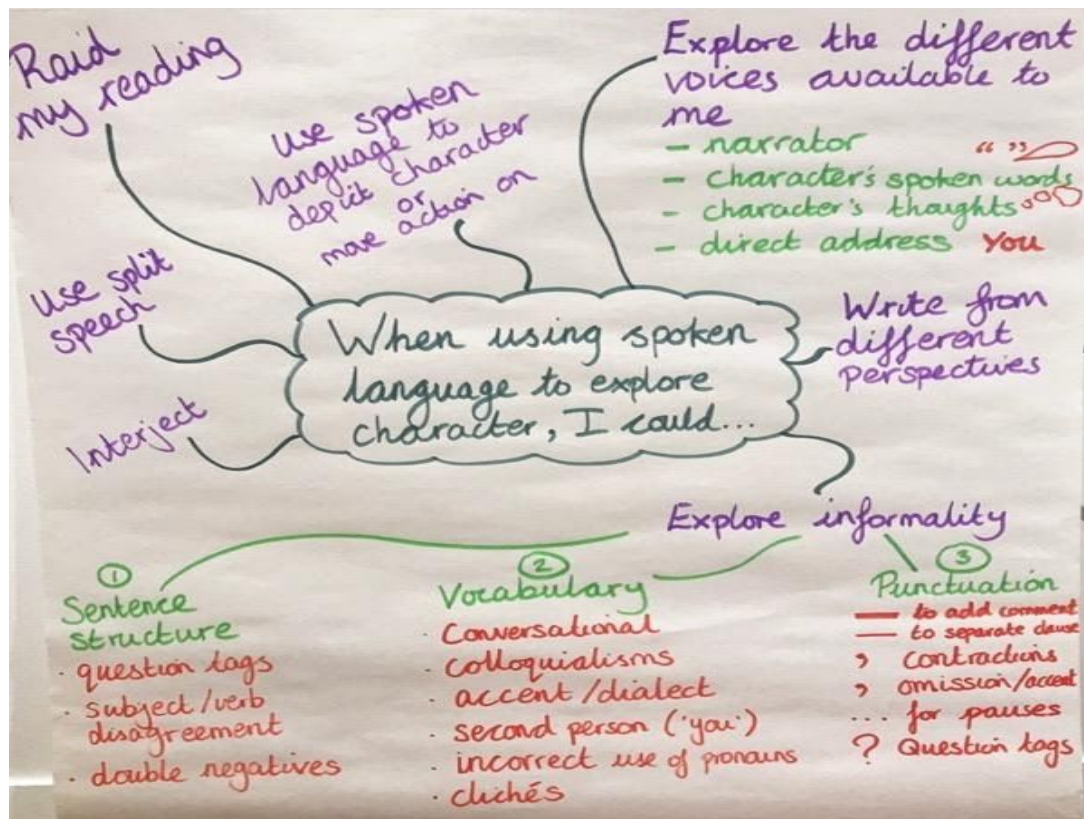
Carly flicked the crumbs off her blue jeans. She had already phoned Mrs Dalloway twice and was thinking that it was typical of her not to be at home just when she was needed. She stared at the baby and wondered yet again where on earth it had come from.

The main character will also have something they really want – a desire or goal. For instance, at the start of the ‘Spiderwick Chronicles’ it is clear that Jared feels angry because he wants his father to come home and the family to be back together again. This extra dimension not only adds realism to the story, it also provides extra emotional impact, drawing the reader into the characters’ lives. When writing a story, it can help to begin with a main character having some sort of problem or negative trait. This characteristic will lead them into difficulties but all may be well by the end.

Toolkit - making characters sound real – collect examples in reading and use in writing:

- Suggestive names – Mr Hardy
- Drop in a few descriptive details
- Think about how the character is feeling
- Show this through what they say or do.
- Reveal a character's thoughts.
- Know your character's desire or goal.
- Use detail.
- Have your main character change during the story.





Character is story

"The characters are the key to the story. They unlock the plot. They make it happen."

from The Moon and Me by Betsy Byars

A great character is essential to a great story. If the reader does not care for the character then why should they bother to carry on reading? In essence, stories are about who we are and what happens to us. Character is central. The advice and activities in this section support children as they create interesting and fully realised characters in their stories.

Create a cast list

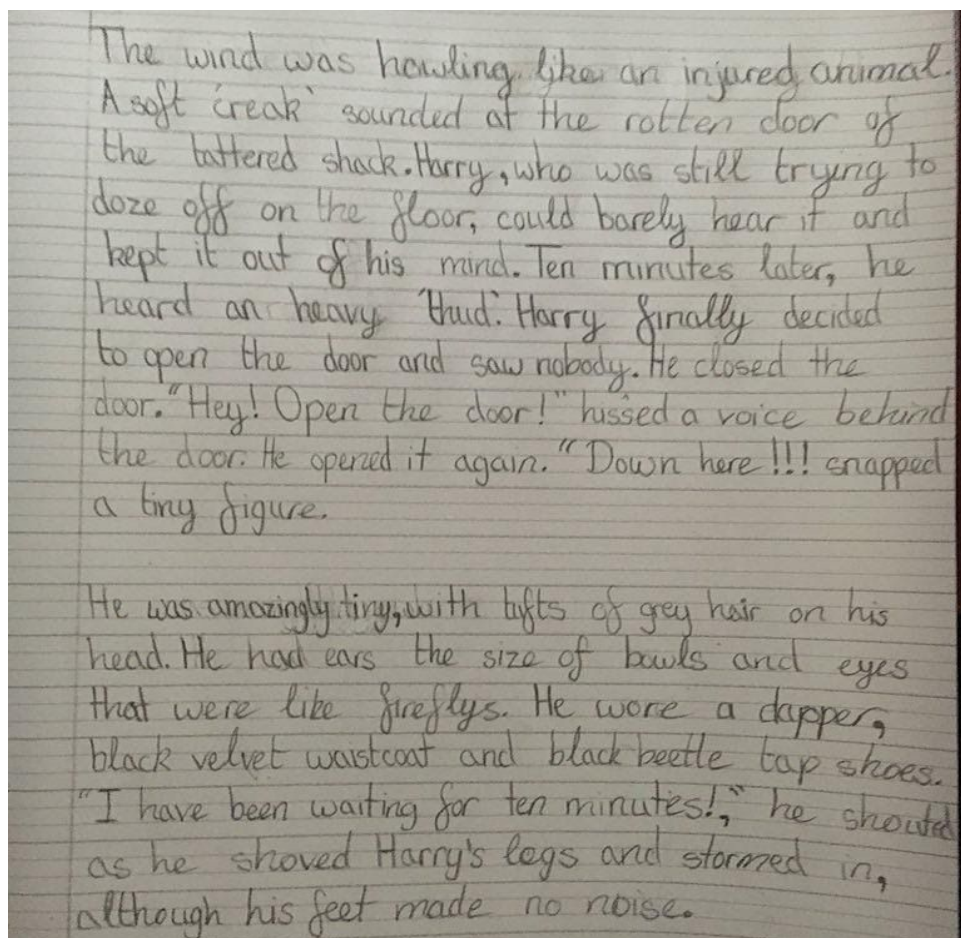
Ask the children to tell you their favourite character from books and films that they know. Question them about their character to establish their role in the story they are in: main hero, main villain, sidekick (friend or other support), family, trigger (minor character who provides a trigger), other minor character

(someone who gives the main character items, advice or helps the plot to move forward in some other way) and so on. Create lists under each character role on the board. Together, think of examples of characters to even up the length of the lists.

Ask: When you come to write your own story, how many characters do you need? Discuss the advantages of not having too many characters to remember and describe and suggest that they aim for: a main character, a support character, a villain (if appropriate for the plot), and one or two minor characters to move the story along (who will not need to be fleshed out particularly well).

Create two contrasting characters, for example bossy/shy, angry/gentle. These can be used for improvised sessions where the children work in role.

In this piece of writing, from Greenbank School, there are two contrasting characters:



- To help, collect and display a list of common character types found in stories, e.g.

The hero/heroine

The helper

Grumpy adult

Boffin

Shy and friendly

Bossy

Swollen headed

Trouble maker

Friend splitter

Posh adult

Nasty teenager

A great name

Choosing an interesting name, or a nickname, for a character helps because if you find the right name then you may not need much description. For example, a teacher called Mrs Dread sounds pretty scary! As I've stated, Roald Dahl's characters often had names that reflected their character, for example Aunt Spiker and Mr Twit. Recent nicknames that I have gathered included: Skater, Maggot, The Whistling Kid, Solly and Midge.

Create a class list of names for 'good' characters and names for 'bad' characters. Start with an ideas-gathering session then display it to create a useful class resource. Get the children to look out for interesting names – from shops, relatives' names, place names, signposts, or on television and list them in their writing books or add them to a class list.

Ask the class to skim through various novels and create names of goodies, baddies and minor characters. Add these names to

the class list. Tell them to look out for names that sound intriguing. Once they've completed their list, ask them to choose one name each and tell the rest of the group what sort of character the name conjures up.

Bringing characters to life

1. Using detail

Physical details are the most straightforward place to start with a character. Work together to label their character with descriptive phrases or lists, for example:

Hair – *shaggy, blonde, messy*

Nose – *big, pointed, like a beak*

Mouth – *mean, thin, red lips*

Teeth – *white, sharp, crooked*

Eyes – *red, glaring, blazing, mean*

Hands – *thin, lined, wrinkled*

Walk – *stagger, dash, run, hobble*

Clothes – *green sweater, blue jeans, umbrella*

Spoken expression – *'leaping lizards!'*

Provide the children with paper to create similar pages for their own main character.

Tip: Encourage the children to create detailed notes and phrases about their character. However, when they come to write, children should only use a little description, as too much can interfere with the story. Teach children to use a little description when a character first appears, e.g. Sal smoothed down her school skirt... Try saving a detail to drop in at a later point, e.g. Sal glanced in the shop window and tugged up her orange socks... Finally, it can help to think of a person that you know well and just alter something about them to create a new character!

2. Make your character a specialist

To make a character stand out, it can help to make them a specialist in something – this could be a hobby, an interest, a sport, an obsession with trains, skateboarding, watching soaps, playing computer games or collecting glass animals.

Make a list of possible ‘specialisms’ and let the children add to this during the year. It is a good idea for them to choose ‘interests’ that they have – because then they can draw on what they know and the details of their own hobbies as they write.

Discuss how having a ‘specialism’ can be used in their narrative. So, a character who watches afternoon soaps will spend a lot of time lazing about on the sofa and talking about what has been happening. He or she might wonder what a favourite character would do in his or her situation.

3. What are they like?

Once the children have established what their character looks like, move on to discuss what they are like as a person. Characterisation is different to description. We know a character primarily through what they do and what they say. As a class, draw up a list of personality traits, for example:

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
kind-hearted thoughtful happy-go-lucky lively	bad tempered spiteful lazy frightened

generous quiet enthusiastic brainy	bossy worried greedy mean
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- Having established what their character is like, ask the children to turn to a partner and explain why the character is the way he or she is, or why they behave in the way they do. Tell the children to think about whether their character is frightened of something, or jealous of something.
- Invite children to create a secret for their character. Tell them to decide what it is and who knows it. How will the secret alter their story?
- Tell the children to choose two contrasting character traits for their character: a main good one, for example enthusiastic, with a minor bad one, for example bossy. For a bad character, choose one main bad characteristic, such as bad tempered, with one positive trait, such as brainy.
- Ask the children to think about how their character might change throughout their story: might they start frightened and end brave, or start spiteful and become more thoughtful.

4. Characterisation through action – what they DO

Many children muddle characterisation and description. A little description can help the reader to picture the characters and possibly hint at what they might be like. However, in the main, characterisation is developed through what the characters SAY and what they DO. One good tip is to get the children to think about how their main character is feeling.

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
kind-hearted thoughtful happy-go-lucky lively generous quiet enthusiastic brainy	bad tempered spiteful lazy frightened bossy worried greedy mean

Deciding how your character feels before you start writing is helpful because you then will know what they might say or do. So, a bossy character will behave in one way and a shy person will do something very different, e.g.

A bossy character: *Tina shoved herself to the front of the crowd. "Everybody push," she yelled.*

A shy character: *Tina hovered at the back of the crowd. "I think we should push," she whispered, to no one in particular.*

Before writing, the children should have decided what type of character they have created – or what their character is feeling. This should then influence how the character behaves and what they might say.

How a character behaves is driven through the choice of powerful verbs. Write up sentences of paragraphs and ask the children to change the verbs to transform the character, e.g.

Mrs Wentleberry ambled past the shops.

The verb choice suggests that she is relaxed, taking her time and not in any sense worried or in need of haste. This could be changed to suggest a very different mood, e.g.

Mrs Wentleberry dashed past the shops, her legs scurrying along as fast as she could.

5. Characterisation through speech - what they SAY

Of course, how a character feels, or the type of person they are, will influence not just what they do in different situations but also what they say and how they speak.

An angry character might say to a friend:

“Leave me alone!”

This could be strengthened by adding a powerful speech verb:

“Leave me alone,” snarled Baz.

Alternatively, an adverb could be used:

“Leave me alone,” said Baz, angrily.

In this case, the adverb tells the reader directly how Baz is feeling. The use of the word ‘snarled’ means that the reader has to work a little harder to deduce that he is angry.

6. Use background details

Use the following questions to help the children build up some background details about their characters. Use questions to develop a mini-history for main characters:

Where is your character at the start of the story?

What are they doing?

What or who is nearby

Favourite school subject?

Best television programme?

Best pastime?

Best friend?

If they had a £100 what would they buy?

Who would they go to if in trouble?

If they could be someone famous who would it be?

Best characteristic?

Worst characteristic?

Who or what is really important to them?

7. Further activities for developing ideas about character

- Tell the children to draw or create a backpack for their main character. Are they organised? In which case they might have a bottle of water, a map and a phone. Perhaps they just have a magazine and a bar of chocolate.
- Get the children to draw a mind map for their character. Tell them to write their character's name in the centre of a piece of paper. Then to write four to six areas of interest around the name, for example: friends, fears, hopes, appearance, personality, family, enemies, home, skills and so on. Ask them to expand each of their chosen subheadings.

- Hot-seat characters from well-known stories, asking about their role in the story, their motives plus background details.
- Working in pairs, one child can pretend to be a journalist and conduct an interview with their partner who is in role as their own main character. Use some of the questions above, plus others that the children generate, to carry out the interview, building up the main character.
- Get the children to sit back to back and then, working in role as their characters, to phone each other. Provide a topic for discussion, for example, one of them has just witnessed Jack climbing up the beanstalk!
- Provide the class with simple scenarios and ask them to turn to their partner and tell them what their main character would do and why. For instance, 'what would your character do if they met some children bullying an old lady?'
- Ask the children in their pairs to choose one of these characters each and to improvise a conversation in role, pretending they are:
 - neighbours*
 - on a quest together*
 - long-lost friends*
 - waiting for a unicorn to have its shoes shod*
 - a pop star and a fan*
 - looking at a stranded dolphin*
 - both lonely but very shy*
- Repeat the activity, using modern characters. In this improvisation, one of them has to tell the other, one of the following:
 - your son has been in trouble at school*
 - you've failed your exams*

*the prize you thought you had won is going to someone else
you are sacked
you have missed the train
you are late for work*

- Ask the children to work in pairs. Ask each pair to improvise a conversation between two characters in a waiting room while they are both waiting to be interviewed for the same job.
- Choose an emotion. Ask the children, in pairs, to take turns to mime one of the following:
*watching a game show on TV
cleaning teeth or brushing hair
putting on shoes
getting dressed
cutting and polishing finger nails
putting on make up
making a difficult phone call
playing cards or a game of chess
talking to an imaginary friend
complaining about someone's music
making and eating a sandwich*
- Ask a child to choose a character. Together, list five objects that this character might have in their pocket (or source as many of objects as you can for the child (a coin, a book, and so on) or ask the children to write these on a piece of paper (a dragon's egg, a magic ring). Ask the children to take the hot-seat or act in role using the props to show who they are. Can the class guess the character's identity? (Either actual, or the type of person they are.) What are the clues? What can they tell from the objects?

- Once the children have begun to put their character into situations, ask the children to write 'in role': a diary entry or a letter to a friend or distant relative about what has happened.
- Hot-seating or interviewing in role as journalists can also lead into writing newspaper articles or broadcasting TV/radio bulletins about events.
- Collect a variety of hats. Ask the children to sit in a circle and place the hats in the centre. Choose one child to select a hat to wear. They should use the hat for inspiration for a character, for example, a baseball cap might suggest a gum-chewing teenager. Choose another child to role play one of the following scenarios with the hat-wearing character:
 - Buying a present for a friend*
 - Talking to mum on a mobile phone*
 - Waiting in a queue*
 - Being late home*
 - Explaining why homework is not done*
 - Asking for a ball back*
 - Being interviewed by a journalist about an event*
 - Arguing about who will win the football match*

8. Character motives

Motive is hard to separate from plot, but work on motive will reap benefits both with characterisation and with a real purpose for stories. Many children's stories are weak because their characters seem to act like puppets without any real reason or motive for behaving in the way they do. Develop the children's understanding of motive by discussing characters from well-known stories, the class book or films that the children have seen.

Ask: What did they do – and why?

Experiment with the idea of 'motive' by creating a class character (for example, Mr Wargle) and then noting something that the character has done (for example, stolen a doughnut from a teashop). Then list the possible 'motives', for example:

Who?	What did they do?	Why? – the motive
Mr Wargle	stole a doughnut	hunger
Mrs Zarp	stole a doughnut	She is an alien and didn't know she had to pay.
Lord Holmes	stole a doughnut	The baker is a thief and has a hidden diamond ring in the doughnut.

The short story below is based on contrasting characters. I've provided some teaching notes which were for an article about attaining greater depth.

Coral Ocean

Amira's tongue seemed to be stuck in her mouth. They had practised saying 'good morning' in English so many times but now that she needed to say it, the words stuck fast. She looked down at her scuffed shoes and said nothing. Nothing seemed easier. The teacher towered above her. He was taller than her one from home; home seemed like a lifetime ago.

The teacher walked her outside into the playground to be with the other children. A sharp wind blew across the tarmac and Amira shivered. She missed the warm scent of orange blossom; this new school just smelt of the city streets. She ached when she thought of her old friends; here, she knew no one.

Not quite knowing what to do, Amira wandered between the groups of children, dragging the school bag that she had been given. She could just see her little brother, Amir, in the other playground surrounded by all the younger children. He stood still with his thumb stuck in his mouth, looking lost; everyone else seemed to be moving round him, weaving in and out as they played. She longed to go to him; she knew mama would have. For a moment, the memory of her mother held her fixed, paralysed. Once again, she relived the moment when they had been running...

Mr Walker looked out across the playground. Shrugging his shoulders against the bitter wind, he

hugged his mug of coffee and glanced at his watch. Ten minutes to go. He could see the new children, both uncertain how to break the ice. The Syrian girl, Amira, seemed transfixed. The girl from Cornwall had also not settled in and just looked angry. She had already been with them for a week and still not settled. He sipped his coffee and sighed. It was going to be a tough day.

Coral Ocean stood on the edge of the playground and waited. No one came near. All the other kids seemed to be absorbed in their own games. She gazed out through the railings and pretended to stare at something in the distance. Blinking back tears, she roughly rubbed her eyes and hoped that no one would notice.

“What’s up?” A tall boy had come across and stood bouncing a tennis ball.

“Clear off!” snapped Coral, scuffing her shoe against the railings.

“Please yourself,” muttered the boy. He spun round and raced back across the playground, bouncing his ball as he went. Coral could see him chatting to some other children and pointing at her. Everything seemed wrong.

How she longed for her old school! Coral missed the sunlit playground in sight of the sea; her new school stood in the cold shadows of a tower block. She missed the thrill of playtime games; here, no one knew her. She missed the walk home along the cliff tops with Amy; here, she had to catch the bus, alone.

At that moment, there was a shout that brought Coral back to the present. Some of the children were standing round a girl she had not noticed before. One of them had grabbed the girl's school bag. Now, they were throwing it round the group. The girl had no chance of getting it back. They were laughing and shouting but the girl stood in the middle, her eyes full of tears. Coral dashed forwards, her fists clenched as she yelled, "Leave her be!" The group turned to stare.

A sharp whistle froze everyone in the playground to a juddering halt. Mr Walker stood with hands on his hips and waited. Some of the children hung their heads. "Line up," he snapped, "Now."

Back in the class, Mr Walker introduced everyone to the newcomer. She was called Amira and had travelled all the way from Syria. The new girl stood at the front of the class, finding it hard to look at anyone, scrunching the hem of an ill-fitting dress. "Coral, I think you had better look after Amira," said Mr Walker, steering her towards where Coral sat. Shuffling her books to one side, Coral made a space. She glanced sideways at the new girl. Amira gave her a shy smile; Coral grinned back.

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Teaching Notes for Greater Depth

Reading into Writing

When you look at genuine greater depth writing, it soon becomes obvious that these are children who read an enormous amount of quality literature. The richness, amount and quality of the reading shapes and determines the writer that a child may become. Constant reading builds their imaginative world so that they have more possibilities to draw upon when writing. Constant reading builds vocabulary, as about 70% of vocabulary comes from reading. They are internalising the written style of their favourite writers. The more children read, the more they internalise accurate use of punctuation, spelling patterns as well as the flow of narrative. Indeed, you can tell what a child reads by reading their writing; it will be an echo of their reading!

The Reading Spine

If reading is one key factor in determining writing, we need to ensure that we are working from high quality books. The school's Reading Spine should identify the core, must-have read aloud texts that every child will experience. The choice is clear – do we read to the class 'Captain Underpants' or 'Tom's Midnight Garden'? Schools with high attainment, despite serving challenging areas, have a strong commitment to increasing the amount that children read but also to introducing children to a range of high quality literature and authors. They have a curriculum map that identifies which texts will be used, ensuring a balance of poetry, story and non-fiction. Many have half class sets of the core books so that children can read along but also so the books can be used for comprehension work, drama, writing-in-role as well as providing a model for writing.

Models for Writing

Many schools teach writing through carefully selected and well-crafted writing models. These need to be short, worth reading and have a clear, transferable pattern for the children's own writing. To some effect, the quality of the model determines the quality of the children's responses.

Over time, children build up a range of story types such as 'warning stories' and use these as a basis for their independent writing. They can be taught to identify how a writer creates effects such as making a character sound real or techniques for building tension. These writing tools gradually become internalised by reading as a writer and analysing texts as well as plenty of practice. Reading as a writer becomes a habit for many children. Increasingly, they begin to draw on their own reading, noticing ideas, turns of phrase or sentence patterns that they could 'magpie'.

Caysie Freeman, a year 5 teacher at Watermoor Primary School, has folders on the wall that contain snippets from quality books that the children refer to when writing. These contain extracts for characterisation, dialogue, action, suspense, settings for atmosphere, exciting openings and satisfying endings. Her reading lessons also act as a strong bridge between studying quality literature and writing. In this way, the models for writing are supplemented by drawing on quality literature.

Innovating on a Model

In KS2, children should only 'hug closely' to the original model if they are new to the English language or have particular needs. In that way everyone succeeds. More confident writers use the

underlying plot pattern (e.g. Warning story) and writing tools, increasingly leaving the model behind. They may embellish, alter what happens, change viewpoints, re-write in the style of their favourite author, reset the story within the world of the class novel or begin to use flashbacks and time slips to alter the narrative pattern. In this way, the model is not a constraint. Greater depth writers also draw on their own reading, as well as what the imagination offers.

Shared Writing

The shared writing that the teacher leads, where the class co-construct an innovation, has to be pitched at greater depth. In this way the teacher is constantly engaging the class cognitively and linguistically in thinking and writing at that level. The teacher uses the underlying pattern and writing techniques from the model, showing how to create an imaginative and powerful text. The shared writing draws on the class's Reading Spine making the link between reading and writing obvious.

A love of words is an essential aspect to grow in the classroom. If children do not enjoy words then they will never become great readers, let alone be great writers. Playfulness and creativity is an important aspect of a successful writing class. For instance, play 'The City of Stars. In this game, the children work in pairs. Partner A writes down a list of generic places ('city' rather than 'Paris') or containers (bag). Partner B writes down a list of abstract nouns. The two lists are formed independently and then placed together to produce random phrases such as '*the garden of greed*', or '*the city of panic*'. These may be enjoyed, saved in magpie books or immediately used as a basis for writing a short paragraph, e.g. *Car horns blasted, a bus mounted the pavement and cyclists wove between the jam of vehicles. A wave of people dashed down the*

road, screaming in terror. The sounds echoed down side alleys and over the buildings as the city of panic swarmed with every living soul running for their lives.

Word choice often ruins what might have been a great piece of writing where children have been lead to believe that good writing consists of lots of 'big' words; a form of showing off with language. This leads to over-written, fanciful writing that detracts from the impact on the reader. Odd word choices stall the flow of the imagination as it responds to the writing. Each word has to earn its place and be carefully selected. Sometimes the simplest words create the right effect. In the same way, when children are asked to insert semi-colons or examples of the passive this too can make composition harder and reduce the quality. The answer is to practise using semi-colons until it becomes second nature.

Working with 'Coral Ocean'

I wrote this story after visiting a local school and meeting some children who had come from Syria. The line, *'she relived the moment when they had been running...'* is based on the story that a reception child told her teacher. This made me think about the challenge that new children have to fit into a new home, a new country and to make new friends. In terms of literacy, the story hinges around two key ideas. It is a 'wishing story' where the main characters really want something. It is also a character change story where the main character starts in a negative position but ends in a more positive situation.

Tune the children into the theme of the story by using Shaun Tann's wonderful wordless picture book 'The Arrival'. Careful reading of the images and rich book talk develop a sense of how when we become torn away from the familiar, the world

looks different, perhaps more threatening. In Jamie Thomas's class, Max in year 6, wrote this response to the early pictures.

***Life drains away, plunging the world into solitude.
The colour that once flowed, now gone,
Receding into the distance like a fragment of memory.
Hands that were once tightly clasped, ache in defeat.***

The line '*hands that were once clasped, ache in defeat*', picks up on a detail from early in the book where the mother places her hand on top of her husband's, on top of his suitcase. The greater depth writer has a big vocabulary and the temptation is to write in abstractions, but it is the concrete image that is seen and experienced by the reader's imagination. Learning to suggest atmosphere, emotions and ideas through concrete description can have a powerful impact on the quality of writing. Use short-burst writing to train the children how to describe characters, objects, settings, events, or build tension so that they become adept at writing accurate paragraphs that build the reader's imagination. It is worth remembering that greater depth writers are very accurate at spelling and punctuation so that they are able to concentrate fully on the flowing of composition and crafting the writing.

The challenge with 'Coral Ocean' is to write a short story or an opening chapter from a novel in which there are two contrasting characters that have both been flung together in a totally new setting. There needs to be a pivotal reason or event that brings them together. Furthermore, there has to be a shift in viewpoint between the main characters.

Read carefully with the class to consider the way the story is structured so that the second character does not appear until the second half of the story. Look at the sentences using semi-colons and practise writing sentences that show contrasts

that suggest how the character feels. Ask the children what books they might think about or draw upon as they write. Let them talk ideas through in twos and threes before they write.

Planning

Greater depth writers often do not need much in the way of planning as they have internalised a strong sense of structure through constant reading. They know that a narrative needs to introduce a problem and drive towards a conclusion.

Over-planning often means that the writing becomes stilted as if the children are 'writing-by-numbers'. Stronger writers usually are happier launching in so that their imagination kicks in and the story emerges as they write. Having said that, the great children's novelist Joan Aiken once told me that she thought that it was always a good idea to write the last line first as that might stop rambling and provide a direction for composition. Greater depth writers may need more time for drafting as well as revisiting their writing, editing and developing through rewriting sections that seem weaker.

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