



SESSION 30 - TEACHING NOTES - A surprise!

Monday 5th July 2021 9.30 – 10.30 am

Today's Game – On the Island of..... there are.....:

The children will be creating an island and populating it with animals, geographical features, etc.

Rapid generating of ideas. Use the following as a guideline:

First – invent your island – The island of....

- a. Five animals
- b. Five birds
- c. Five fish
- d. Five insects
- e. Five geographical features
- f. Five plants/ trees
- g. Other ideas

On the Island of there are.... that.....

On the island of stars there are dolphins that swim in the lagoons.

On the island of stars there are grasshoppers that can jump higher than a palm tree.

On the island of stars there are rivers that flow backwards and hillsides where poppies grow.

Padlet – To warm up imagery, we will use the padlets to revisit:

The raindrop is like a tear – The raindrop is a tear – The rain cries tears....

<i>simile using like</i>	<i>The sun set like a sinking, golden coin tucked into a giant's pocket.</i>
<i>simile using 'as'</i>	<i>... as silent as a thief in a library wearing padded shoes. ... as cold as a turned shoulder. ... as cold as an open freezer's breath ... as cruel as an unforgiving tyrant ... as slow as an oak tree growth</i>
<i>metaphor</i>	<i>The ladybirds were scarlet buttons on a black jacket.</i>
<i>personification</i>	<i>The trees stooped down and brushed the hedgerow. The stars winked at the moon's smile.</i>

Objective – writing sentences using different forms of imagery

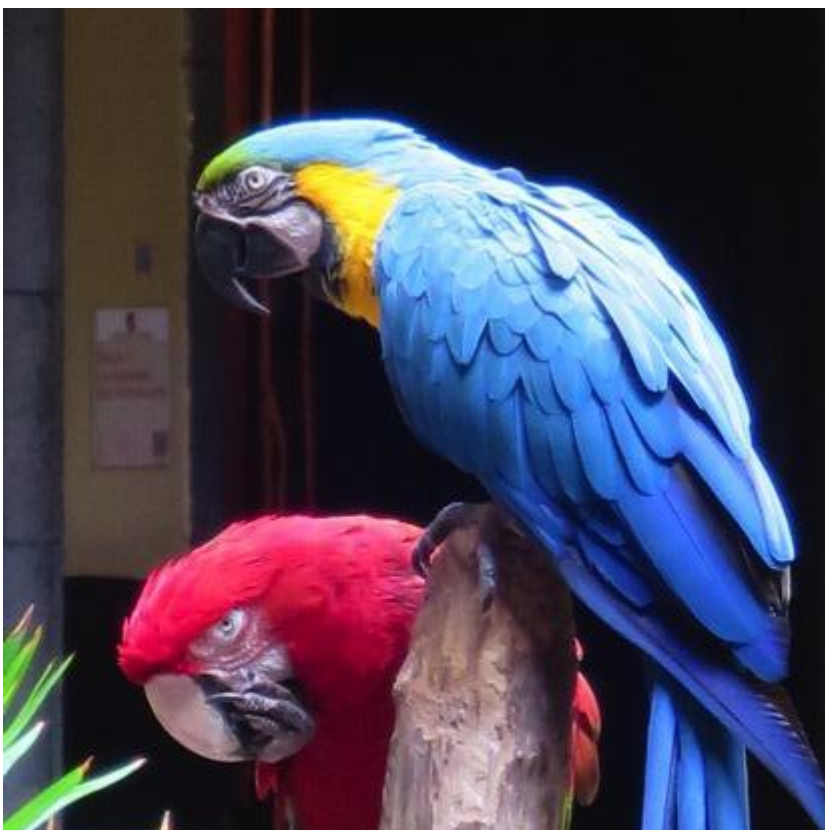
Children's Audio – learn to listen and discuss impact.

Jotcast activity – rehearsing the ability to notice detail and write about it vividly: *Objective – describing detail to create an image for the reader.*

Detail	Ideas
eye	A red-rimmed eye glares like an eclipsed sun, furious as fire.
beak	its blade-beak curves like a butcher's hook, ready to slice and grab.
claws/ talons	Gnarled talons grab the perch, wrinkled and tough as an oak tree's roots.
feathers	a sleek shimmer of feathers ruffles
red	red as a carnival lights
blue	mascara powder -blue
yellow	daffodil yellow
tail	like a shimmer of a dancer's skirt

Detail	Ideas
eye	
beak	
claws/ talons	
feathers	
red	
blue	
yellow	
tail	

Gallery Challenge – draw or paint a parrot:





Blogging Activity – Persuasive writing – The blog challenge is to respond in writing to the image provided. The children should write as they wish, drawing on all the different types of writing that we have explored. PLEASE DO NOT SHOW THE IMAGES OF THE TWO CREATURES BELOW BEFORE THE SESSION AS I'D LIKE THEM TO BE A SURPRISE:

Observation poetry

Playful poetry

Story extract

Prologue

Information report / fact file

Instructions

Explanation

Discussion

Advert

Newspaper report

Breaking news

Diary

Letter

Other ideas.....

The images are by the amazingly talented Andy Frazer and are his copyrite. I would highly recommend purchasing his book '**Dragons of the Dark Woods**' and several sets of his dragon postcards as great resources for writing. Available from here:

<https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/dragonsofwales>

Objective – respond in writing independently using an image.

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Invention Units

Why does pure invention matter? There is a very real danger in just using direct teaching that is not balanced by the chance for children to constantly apply what they have been taught, growing their own voice and way of looking at the world. In the same way that children grow as readers, gradually developing a taste for certain types of writing and authors that speak to their hearts, we need to grow young writers who from the very beginning in Nursery learn that what they have to say in their own way is accepted and is a matter of interest to us as their teachers, otherwise we erode their confidence in themselves as communicators.

Just consider for a moment, the heavy weight that sits upon a young writer's shoulders – the dominance of models, frames, boxing-up, toolkits, criteria and everything else that tells a child how to communicate. If children are to grow as writers we need to balance the direct teaching alongside the subtle movement that has to take place between a child's confidence in their ability to think and the act of turning thought into writing that allows a child to bring new ideas into being as well as shaping ideas to communicate effectively.

Because the process of imitation and innovation are so powerful and means that children produce fluent writing, teachers tend to mistrust invention. A five year old may be able to retell the whole of *The Gingerbread Man*. When inventing their own story, the same child will only be able to create an unstructured story fragment. However, the more the child is encouraged and the more they practice, the more rapidly story structure and effect grow. If we do not allow children the opportunity to invent, then we undermine their growth in independent, inventive composition.

Where teachers encourage children to move away from the model text when innovating, their confidence grows as they become increasingly inventive and independent. In these cases, it is as if the model text has been the stimulus but not much more than that. As the children write, they draw on the model plus their reading and other texts that have caught their imagination.

The shadow

It started with a shadow.

A shadow: small enough to sit in your pockets, small enough to slide through the door frame... that kind of thing. And László could handle that kind of thing. The shadows lived with László. They hid everywhere: in the empty kettle, after his mum has poured out her tea; in the attic, after Christmas. Sometimes they hid in the dark, damp corners of his window.

But, this shadow was different. The first time it came, it was gone - lost even. The second time, a few weeks later, but it kept creeping closer and closer to László's room. From then on, the same shadow would creep through the house, gliding from room to room. It was as though a ghost was haunting László.

The shadow was small at first, just a dot. Then it would stretch across the floor, as though it was being held back.

The shadow would return every night. It came at 9.50pm and László would wait for it.

Then it moved.

Here are some ideas that might trigger further thinking. We need to move to a situation where invention units are planned for and cover a range of intriguing starting points and possibilities across the primary years. To this end, I have tried to categorise six different starting points to make annual planning simpler. THERE FOLLOWS NOTES ON THE FIRST THREE

CATEGORIES.... THE OTHER THREE HAVE YET TO BE WRITTEN ABOUT!!!

1. **Location Writing**– old buildings, woods, alleyway, sea front, building site, zoo trip, trip to the shoe shop, railway line, old manor house, farm, galleries, museums, day trips and residentials, fossil hunting; seasons & weather – thunderstorm, rain, snow, frost, dew.
2. **Observation & Curiosity boxes** – tree bark, hands, candles, buttons, ties, photos, feathers, back of a broken t.v. set, a ship-in-a-bottle, leaf skeletons, a spider’s web, a pomegranate sliced in half.
3. **Art** – drawing before writing, postcards/posters of paintings, gallery visits, music, sculptures, film clips, photos, dance; literature – responses to novels, picture books, films or poems.
4. **Set ups** – planned experiences – a visit from Baxter the dog, the shoemaker visits, a spaceship lands in the playground, dragon claw marks, a robbery, footsteps appear; drama and play challenges – stranded on a desert island, the king’s toymakers are summoned, evacuees – don’t be split up, dressing up.
5. **My Life** - things mum says, my teacher is..., friends, enemies; memories – secret places, details, strange events, old dreams, things I used to do, bonfire night, dark in my room, trip to the dentists, funniest thing that ever happened to me, memorable incidents – moving home, what makes me angry, the worst holiday we had, sad times, happy things.
6. **Cross-curricular** –writing about science, history, art, geography, etc, to enhance and explore the world.

1. Location Writing and Creative Visits

Trips could be made that lead into writing. I have made a number of these special events with Stone-with-Woodford Primary School. On one occasion we went on a dragon hunt. We visited Chepstow Castle to look for signs of dragons, stopped in the Forest of Dean by the giant's chair (part of the forest's sculpture trail) where I told a dragon story and we ended up creeping through Coleway Caves listening for dragons. Children brought with them their magpie books to jot down ideas and record what they had seen, writing in the moment of the experience.

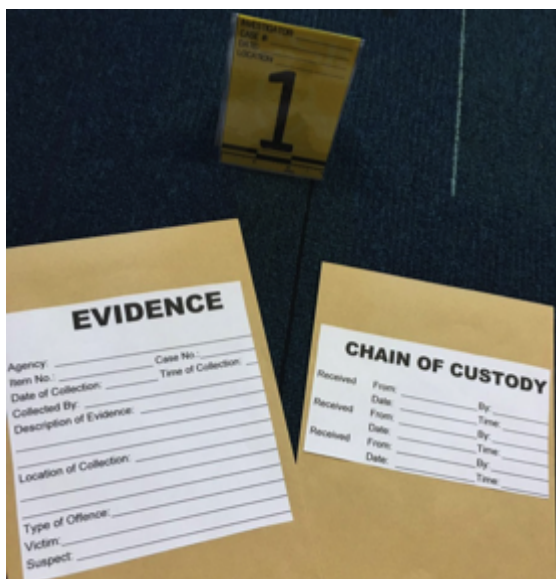
On another occasion, we visited 'Hellens Manor' in Herefordshire. At the Tudor manor, there was one room called 'Hetty Walwyn's Room'. During the 18th century, a girl called Hetty had been confined for over 30 years in her room by her mother. Her crime had been to run away with a stable hand. On a windowpane there was a message scratched with a diamond ring! Of course, rumour has it that her ghost still haunts the room. I used some of the details from the actual manor, the paintings and artifacts to create a story and to provide historical background. By the time we were about to read, I had written the first draft and shared it with the class. You can find the story, 'Hetty's Unicorn' on the internet:

http://www.teachprimary.com/learning_resources/view/pie-cobetts-fiction-unicorns

Probably the best invention unit we did arose from a visit to Woodchester Mansion, which is an abandoned mansion, half-completed, strangely deserted. Check it out on the internet. I wrote to the class beforehand stating that disturbing news had reached me. Strange lights and noises had been heard coming from the manor at night and should they be on the lookout for what was going on.

The children arrived several days later in role as investigators. They searched for clues, interviewed specialists who knew about bats, owls and badgers. There were 3 lads who had been night fishing, various dog walkers and, in the end, a policewoman arrived (all drama students).

The grand finale occurred when the fishermen, who turned out to be the robbers, leapt out of a window with the policewoman in hot pursuit! The whole writing project led from making notes during the interviews, observation in situ through to letters, diaries, police logs, information reports as well as story writing.



I missed out last Summer on their trip to Wales. The older class had been enjoying the novel 'River Boy' by Tim Bowler which features a waterfall. Part of their trip into the Brecon Beacons was to a waterfall, where they could stand behind the fall! I wonder whether they saw the river boy?

While I was working at Honiton a few years ago, I took the flipchart outside to a wooded area. On the spot, I did shared writing, using the details around us and pretending that we were crawling through the woods as darkness settled in. Somewhere there is a film of that occasion. The point about location writing – being ‘on-site’ as the story happens – is that it not only builds the imaginative experience but also the sense are alert to the possibilities of the details that might make the story realistic.

Not everyone can set up a situation the a tiger on the beach but Brian Moses wrote a poem about this tiger which was often taken for ‘walkies’ along the beach on the Isle of Wight. In the Yorkshire there is a village where a tiger lived and the children performed a play about their tiger which apparently roamed the streets!



This could lead to diary writing,
the start of an adventure story
or
Close observational writing,
describing the tiger.

What sorts of places are close to the school that might lend themselves to writing? In Aberdeen, I based a ‘kidnapped’ story in an old house that was ‘*doon by the Macdonald’s roundabout*’. I’ve also used an old abattoir in Bristol, a

gardener's hut in a cemetery and an apple orchard in Nailsworth. What places in striking distance can be visited and what sorts of experiences might be set up for drama, art work and writing possibilities. Think about how day trips and 'residential' can be used as a basis for writing – adventure stories, short-burst descriptions, advertising leaflets, diary entries, letters from characters who lived in castles or old houses. Years ago, I invented an idea that we could write in role as a room – a list of memories: *I have seen the hare skinned for roasting in the kitchen; I have seen the old mare on the cobblestones outside, waiting for the Master...*

In terms of poetry/ short-burst writing, while on location, demonstrate to the children how to look carefully at the details of a focus – and jot down words, ideas, similes – using the senses.

Select one thing that makes a powerful focus and as a group brainstorm – draw their attention to detail and using the senses – ask them 'what does it look like... what does it remind you of....?'. When looking at something (say, a cow on a farm trip), it can help to jot down the main things that you can see down the centre of the page – *horns, eyes, tongue, jaws, teeth, saliva, flanks, hooves, tail*. Then begin to build your poem by adding words either side of each thing – adjectives/ verbs, etc

Tail

Then add in words:

Tasseled tail swishes

What does it look like:

Tasseled tail swishes like a bell pull

Then on a flip chart show them how to take the brainstorm ideas and craft them into a simple, descriptive free verse poem, e.g.

*The cow snorts and snuffles,
rubbing her heaving flanks against the railing.
Her horns jut out of her skull
like a Viking helmet,
like handle bars on a lunar monster.
Eyes bulge,
staring like glassy marbles.
Spittle drips from her jaws
as she grinds her teeth,
chewing over
the passing day.....*

Add powerful language and use a dash of poetic technique. Keep going back to the experience. Of course, location writing is helped if you use a camera to capture key images that the class can use for their writing once back at base camp.

Philip Larkin believed that poetry was ‘a way of preserving experience’. Or, as Sally Vile (9 years) said, ‘it’s when you say what things are really like’. This type of writing focuses upon both the nature of the experience and selecting words to recreate and illuminate the truth. This is the sort of writing that Ted Hughes engaged in, staring at a jaguar in London Zoo and jotting down notes for his poems, through to Jamie (9 years) in the playground, sketching the school gate and then writing:

*The creaking gates swing back
like black wings.
Their shadows flicker across the playground
like a card player swiftly*

*dealing his deadly hand.
A frail pattern reflects
like the veins in a leaf
or my Gran's lace curtains
stained by night.*

Jamie (9 years)

Being British, the weather is a constant concern! In narrative, it is a useful vehicle for communicating an atmosphere. In itself, it is fascinating information. Grown men pursue tornadoes across America and the idea that the centre of a tornado is still fascinates.

Icy Breath

*The wind crashes
with a piercing squeal
into the arched reeds
ripping the green
to pieces of thread.
Hair bellows out
as the wind cuts
into your face.
Fiercely,
it bends saplings.
Shredding leaves,
throwing fragments
into the air.*

Tim Clapham (9 years)

It is worth each year doing some basic descriptive writing about storms, snow, fog and rain as these will become useful sources for description within their stories. Here is Julian in my first year 3 class, writing his first poem about snow, following watching it snow and a massive class brainstorm.

Snow

*It grips on roofs.
It camouflages trees,
it makes a quick disguise.
The snow covers the world
like a massive sheet.
The wind bitterly bites your flesh,
It tosses the snow all around the town.
Icicles form on the roof edges and window panes,
someone breaks one
and it shatters into tiny fragments,
it splinters.
Suddenly a blaze of sunlight
sheets through the clouds.*

Icicles always fascinate and can be written about using the same sorts of processes as described above. Here is Kerry in year 4:

*The sharp jagged
 icicle hangs from
the barn's roof
 it is crystal clear
 it is as sharp
as a dagger
 it is
the hang-
 ing icicle
of death.*

2. Observation and Curiosity Boxes

In my first year 5 class, I had a massive 'curiosity box' where I stored all sorts of unusual artifacts. I spent hours at car boot sales and poking around in second-hand shops. I collected curios – tiny shoes, an old camera, a box with a unicorn on the lid, coloured bottles, a silver ring, an ancient wallet, old maps, buttons, leaf skeletons, a dance card from the Titanic, the inside of a clockwork machine, an old clock and so on.



An image such as this would sit well with the novel Cogheart.

Every so often, we would lug out the box and children could choose what they wanted to write about. By then, the class had at their fingertips a range of possibilities; they could use the object in a poem, a story, an article, a news item, a conversation, a monologue, a letter or a diary entry. The teaching could be drawn upon to liberate the writing.



Be on the lookout
for curious objects,
images and pieces
of writing that might
fascinate the
imagination.

The next piece of writing was by Sally Vile (9 years) who once told me that poetry writing was when you 'tried to say what things are really like'.

Skeleton leaf

*Lifeless like tissue
laces neatly threaded
gentle, fragile
the silk delicate embroidery
the veins spreading
network carefully stitched
boney like witch's
fingers
backbone gentle and
tender*

I had in the box an old, back phone. Claire (9 years old) wrote about this phone, describing it. On other occasions, I had pairs of children inventing phone conversations.

The Phone

Hard, black and shiny

*waiting silently
for you to dial, slowly and steadily.
As you put the receiver to your ear
it gently purrs, like a cat
Washing itself.*

Kyron (10 years) was an unusual writer and wrote this short but succinct poem about a compass as part of a three-minute challenge. The class had to choose an object, think what it reminded them of and write with brevity.

The Compass

*Its slick silver slit legs
slither apart
a ballet-dancer
accomplishes the splits*

When using objects, the teacher does have to train the children how to observe and how to set about writing creatively. It is worth have a sequence of writing workshops over time, to train children how to observe, brainstorm ideas and use imagery. Here is an example of one such lesson, focused on 'candles'.

Candles never fail to produce good writing. There is something mesmeric about the experience that always captures the imagination. So, begin by darkening the room as best as possible. Light the candle and then start the brainstorm. Draw the children's attention to the flame, how it moves, the wax, the candle itself. End by blowing it out. To generate similes, it can help to draw a flame shape and ask the children what it looks like or reminds them of – *a leaf, an eye, a spear....*

Draw a simple candle shape on a board and then use some of the words gathered to create a simple shape poem.

*The flame
flickers
restlessly
dodging
and darting
like and
amber
eye
peering
out of the
darkness.*

A key barrier to such creative writing has always been the way in which the most obvious ideas seem to arise so rapidly and dominate our thinking, begging for attention. The creative, problem-solving writer has to know that the first thought is not always the best thought. The first pre-requisite for the young writer is being ready to open up the mind and letting it wander without restriction, allowing ideas to arise spontaneously. This is a form of mind-wandering whereby ideas arise and drift by like clouds in the sky. It is a method of directed thought without direction. It requires the mind to relax, to lose all fear, but to start the business of seeking. It is the act of creative generating.

The second pre-requisite is the ability to be able to spot which ideas might be worth pursuing and which ones to let drift past without needing further attention. This aspect of creative thought is to do with having a sense of what might work given the context or challenge. What deserves further attention? It is a form of swift sifting. It is the beginning of 'judging' what might work

The third pre-requisite is a form of focusing down on those aspects that have been selected for further scrutiny. This is the

inner judge, the critic, 'the reader in the writer', who begins to scrutinize an idea to see whether it does actually fit the bill. This is where a word, phrase, line or idea is placed into the composition to see whether it fits within the whole, adding to the desired effect.

Creative writers are highly skilled at the first two aspects – mind-wandering and idea spotting. These two aspects happen almost simultaneously and automatically (most recently researched by Roger Beaty at Harvard's Department of Psychology). The habit of generating ideas comes through constant brainstorming. This should be a regular feature of prewriting and be used across the primary years. It involves very rapid calling out of ideas with the teacher pushing for more and focusing attention onto unconsidered aspects. It is also developed during the flow of shared writing, where the teacher pushes children to generate the options before choosing which seems to work best. Every so often, there should be a discussion about which one and 'why' does it work most effectively. This is essential, otherwise children run the risk of constant over-writing and often the well-chosen everyday word is what is required.

3. Art & Literature

The other very potent starting point is to use a collection of postcards. Whenever, I visited an art gallery I always bought half a dozen cards. Eventually this has built into a mighty collection of some thousand or so but when I started teaching, I had 40 cards. I would spread these out and children chose which one to use. They might pretend that the image was the front cover of the book and write the title and blurb. They might pretend it was an illustration and write the facing page. It might trigger a poem describing the image or a playful poem. It might start or end a story or just become a paragraph. They could write the paragraph that accompanied the image and then write what happened just before and what happened next. Surreal images worked well, intriguing scenes and portraits. Quite often, we would choose one image and, as a class, I would use shared writing to brainstorm ideas and then collectively pursue the idea to a full piece of writing. In this way, I modeled how to write independently, opening up the possibilities, especially if their writing was repetitive or cosy.

The Rooster and the Hen

(after a painting by Ito Jakuchu)

The tree is a dragon.

Red stems are blazing fire.

The feathers are a wild snake.

Their smooth layers are ridged scales.

*The crown of the rooster rocks unsteadily
like the blade of a whisker.*

*Long strips of grass lie scattered
among the sharp uneven daggers.*

*Clusters of leaves shake
crisp veins of the unknown.*

*Active eyeballs alert,
straining the minute bead.*

*Shaded berries burst beneath nimble bones.
The rooster struts nearby.
Deep pale beds overlap
the shelter of the mushroom.*

Natalie 11 yrs



There are various options for writing about works of art either shown in screen, in situ in a gallery or on a selected postcard. First the child could use a repeating line to create a list of ideas, focusing on the visible details. If we take this famous Dali image then we can see how it would be easy to notice details and embellish each one:



*In this fantasy world I can see –
A walnut head sprouting flowing hair like water reeds,
A mirrored egg, cracks across its ivory surface,
A distant chessboard for the pawns of life....*

The next option is to take a step on from the list poem idea. The young writer notices details and then uses these to try to recreate the image in words and images. In this example Clare, who was 9 years old, writes about Edward Burra's painting The Hand. She picks out key details and string them together to create a simple, descriptive poem:



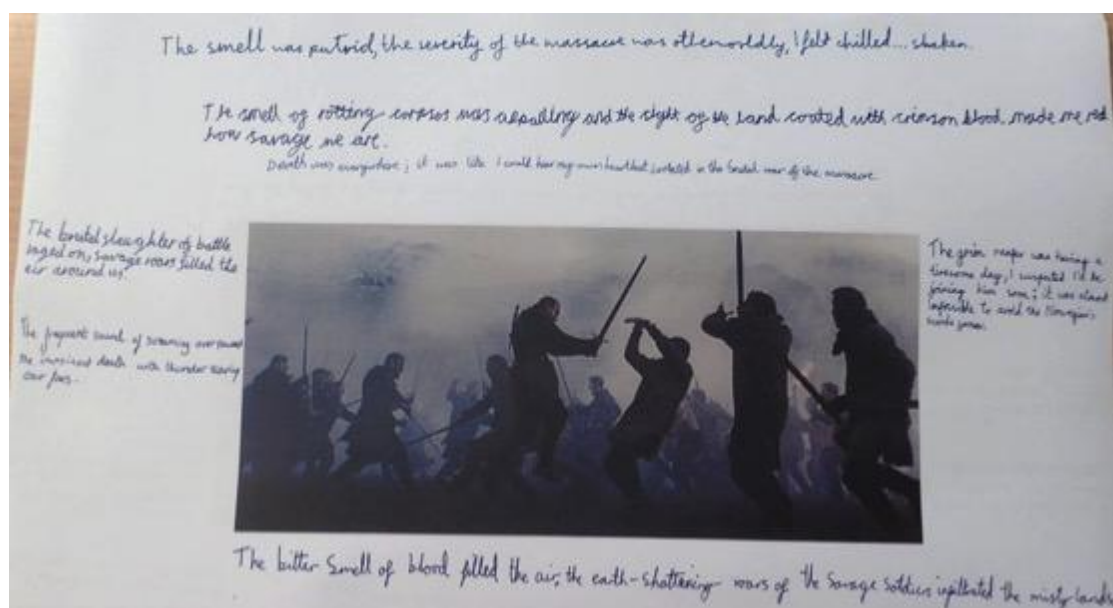
The Poker Room

(painting by Edward Burra 'The Hand')

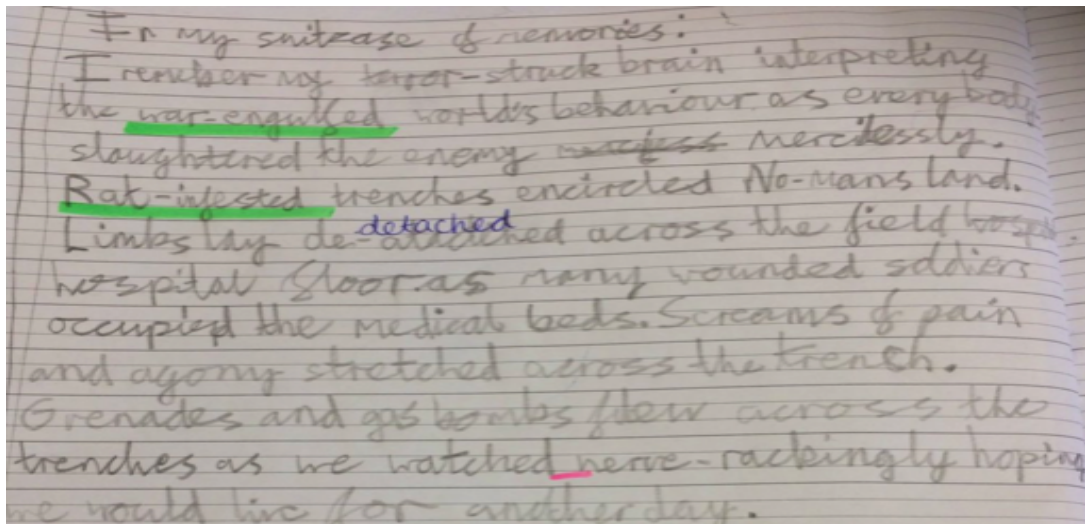
*The knife lies motionless in the murky room.
 The hand quivers, a sudden crash,
 A streak of lightning stuns the silent sky.
 A breeze blown, the cigarette smoke stewaks
 In a misty haze out throiugh the door.
 The table shudders as the stranger reaches
 For the dusty guin boittle.
 The carved, silent ring presents –
 An omen.
 A crumpled week old paper
 Floats to the ground.
 Blurred dost of the dice roll
 To show a six.
 The stranger cackles,
 Startling.*

Clare 10 yrs.

The possibilities for using art postcards seem endless. The image could be the front cover of a book or an illustration in a story. The child writes the opening of the book or the section that sits alongside the image. This sample from a child's exercise book shows an image with a brainstorm of ideas that is then used to write as if they were memories of war. Whilst somewhat crude and clichéd, it shows a way of working from image into text.



The brainstorm based on observing the image and trying to 'enter the picture' imaginatively is then used as part of 'my suitcase of memories' writing in role as a soldier who was present at the battle.



One of the extraordinary things that a poem can do is to bring the world alive – making it sound as if objects could move or animals speak. A poem like Blake's 'The Tyger' is an interesting example of someone talking to an animal. This might easily lead into writing poems in which we talk to other animals or ask questions. For instance, we might talk to a wolf....

Wolf –
*where did you find your misty fur
and you eyes that pierce the night?*

Wolf –
*why do you lope along so silently,
avoiding man's company?*

Wolf –
*have you just crept out of a child's tale
or are you really out there waiting, waiting?*

Of course, animals or objects might speak back. Poets can adopt the role of a creature, an object, a mood or season and speak for themselves.

*I am the night.
I smother the world*

*half by half
in a cloak of darkness.
I am silent –
and leave as soon
as daylight appears....*

To encourage children to bring the world alive it can be helpful to introduce them to the idea of personification - a technique that treats inanimate objects as if they were alive. To introduce the idea, make a simple list of things that humans do – *stare, jump, cry, giggle, dream, snore, climb trees*. Then make a list of objects that can be seen in the room – *window, chair, table, pencil, door, clock, book*. Now put the lists together to bring the room alive: -

*The window stares,
the chair jumps,
the table cries,
the pencil giggles,
the door dreams,
the clock snores,
and the book climbs trees.*

It doesn't take much to add in a few carefully-chosen adjectives and extend some of the lines to create a lively and playful scene: -

*The glassy-eyed window stares out at the world,
While the stiff-back chairs jump for joy,
the old table cries mournful, wooden tears.
A pencil pot giggles to itself,
while the door daydreams of winning at Wimbledon.
As the weary clock snores,
the books run outside to climb trees.*

You can use the same sort of technique to write about scenes, images and paintings. However, you may try to use

personification to recreate the experience rather than just being playful.



First of all, I looked at the picture. I made a list of the six main things that I could see in the picture (what struck me most about the image) and wrote them down the centre of a blank page like this: -

lights

cars

buses

buildings

pavements

windows

I then took each idea in turn and used personification – bringing it alive as though my ideas were creatures: -

lights glare

cars snarl

buses busy themselves

buildings straighten

pavements snake

doorways yawn

I then decided that I would add in some adjectives (remember though that just chucking an adjective at a noun is not necessarily going to lead to good writing – the adjective needs to earn its place – or not be used), also using alliteration to create sound effects and extend some of the ideas. I was still trying to use language to capture the experience that I was looking at:

*Late night city lights glare,
glowering on street corners.*

*Cruising cars snarl by,
their drivers wearing ghostly masks.*

*Buses busy themselves
at street corners,
greeting customers
with sudden warmth.*

*Buildings straighten
to attention like
dark giants high above.*

*Far below pavements snake
across the city
like lines on the palm
of a map's hand.*

*Doorways yawn.
Dawn is a cup of coffee away.*

In this poem, there are lots of metaphors – but also the whole poem becomes a metaphor. Now, all words are metaphors – they represent something. They claim to be what they are not. You say the word ‘stone’ and that becomes a stone – but it is not. It is just a sound. The metaphor helps a writer make an idea visible. The writer doesn’t just liken one thing to another but one thing becomes another, the identity of one thing is imprinted upon another. They are more powerful than the simile, which is a weaker device (the reader is made aware of the device so it may well sound forced). Metaphor is more subtle because the reader may not be aware of its use. But metaphor presupposes a simile. The metaphor grows out of a likeness – but is more economical.

For an image to work well it must be shocking and appropriate. Shocking in that it makes the reader pause, stunned for a second by something new and revelatory. Appropriate because it must be true and telling. A well-crafted image surprises the reader by helping us see the world anew. The image helps us imagine – and that takes us to the core of both what the writer felt and the experience itself. It is the freshness of vision, or word combination, that works, rather than the child recycling a dead metaphor or simile that has been used a million times before and therefore brings nothing new.

It is worth each class having a bank of postcards of art works and striking photographs that invite writing can be set out for the children to use as starting points for their writing.



Drawing into writing

Objects make wonderful triggers to the imagination and drawing is an ideal way into writing. Prop up a rusty bicycle – draw it and then use it as a springboard into descriptive writing. Drawing means that the children have to look closely, noticing details. This meditative process probably helps to place the subject into the child's imagination. The process of writing then requires the use of words to '*say what things look like*' (Sally, 9 yrs). Even simple things like drawing a shoe or your hand can lead into interesting writing. Mark was 8 yrs old when we spent a long time drawing our hands.



After this, he wrote:

*My hand curls up.
My knuckles swell,
like a football
being pumped up.
My fist clenches
ready to collect my revenge.
My fingers bow to the king.
The smallest of them all.
The king is the thumb.*

When I asked him what he was thinking about, he told me,
*'Sherriff stole my football at playtime and I'm going to get
him'!!!*

Begin this lesson by demonstrating on a board how to draw your hand. Encourage the children to look closely and carefully – if you have magnifying glasses these can help as the children will see more clearly the lumps and bumps that create what may look more like a lunar landscape than simple skin.

Now brainstorm words and list them up. Keep this very rapid so that you encourage excitement and rapid thinking. Get them to look at the back of their hands, their knuckles, fingernails and tips, palms, fingerprints, lines across their hands – what are they like? Of what do they remind you? Now use a few of the ideas listed and write a short class poem together in simple free verse – some short lines and some longer. Remember to use some technique – choosing 'good' words, a touch of alliteration and some similes. A typical shared piece might look like this:

*Like a crab,
My hand scuttles along.
Ridged like a stumble of hills,*

*it spreads out fingers
or clenches into a tight fist.
Etched with lines,
like a fan of veins,
my palm is the road map to my future.
Fingernails curve,
ready to scrape and scratch.
Thumbs up -
a hand shake –
or a threat!
My hands speak for me.*

When writing in this vein, we draw upon both the experience and our selves. Once the teacher has helped the children learn how to look carefully at an experience and use words to bring that experience alive (by using words that touch and taste and smell, words that you can hear, that recreate the experience) – then the children can capture any experience they wish. This is Richard, from my second class, drawing and then writing about a pot plant.

Plant

*A stain of bright green mould
stings your delicate peeling bark.
Lichen surrounds you
as grey moss covers your bulk.
Your wide withered arms
camouflaged by creeping,
introducing leaves which bulge and
are supple as palm trees.
Your weathered growth rings
lie stuck like splodges on the
wrinkled stump. You are
getting old little plant, you can tell –
you have minute whiskers
urging from your branches.
The pattern ingraved on you
repeats like a record carrying
on and on until it smothers you completely.*



Richard Cobbold, 10 yrs.

The drawing means that the child has to take time staring at the object, noticing the details. This meditative concentration then has an echo into their writing. Here is Richard, 9 years old, drawing and writing about a bicycle which was set up in the classroom.

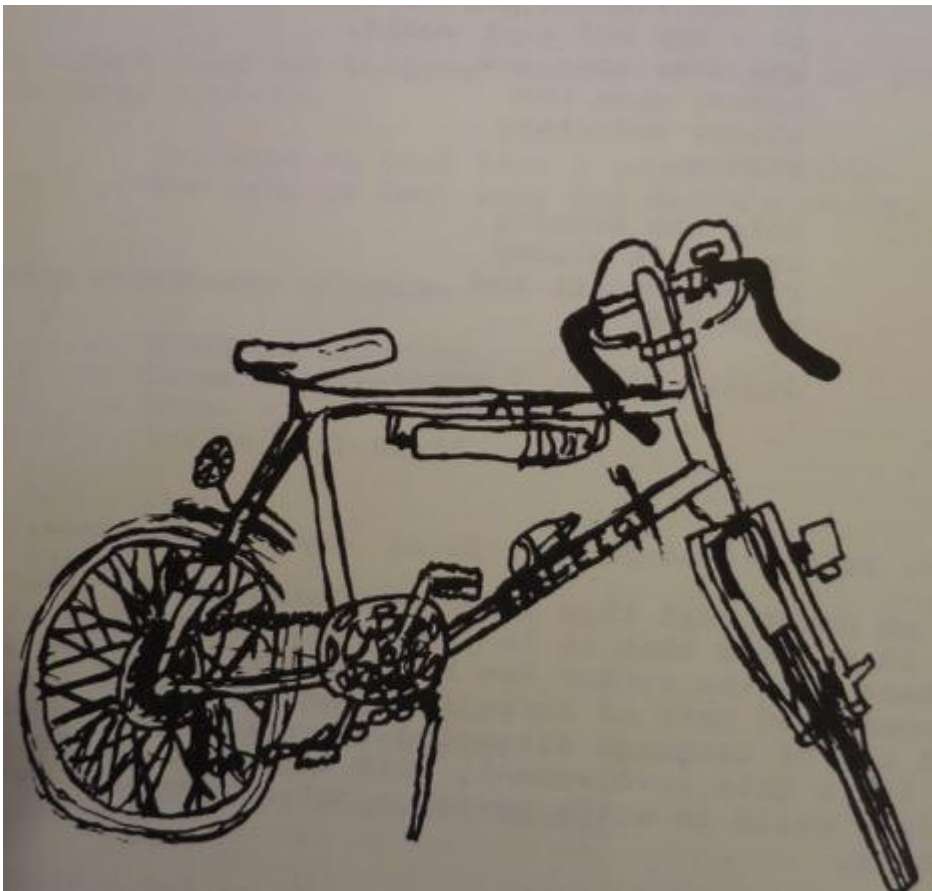
Drowsy Bike

*Brakes slowly squeeze
A revolving rim.
Chain reacts,
Following, slowing,
A sliding bike.*

*A battered mudguard,
Rubs painfully
At a grubby tyre.*

*Spokes cling tiredly
To a miserable gear,
Chained, not to a cell,
But to a weary circle of
life.*

Richard, 10 years.



In the same way, Ted Hughes carried a notebook with him when working on his farm in Devon, recording events as they happened, learning how to stare intently in order to see the truth of what was happening, *'to make a fleeting snapshot...of a precious bit of my life...'*. In the introduction to Moortown Diary (Faber 1989) Hughes noted that *'if I wish to look closely I find I can move closer, if I phrase my observations about it in rough lines.'* He notes that this form of on the spot free verse that requires his *'watching eye'* also helps him *'see quite clearly'* when trying to recall events; *'the process of memory, the poetic process'* of transforming and preserving experience. He refers to the poems as his *'surviving voice-track of one of my days, a moment in my life that I did not want to lose'*. In this sense, the writing is also about preserving and making more of our own history.

In the same way, Gerard Manley Hopkins' notebooks show how he absorbed experience, filtering through his mind a stream of words and images to attempt to capture what he was looking at – to get inside its skin, to know its true self. In the classroom, the teacher may provide the focus (say – a candle), train children how to observe, calling on the senses but also must train the children how to brainstorm words and ideas - how to generate language rapidly firing out possibilities. And finally, there is process of selecting what Coleridge described as, *'the best words in the best order'* – *'fishing'* for the right word. For that to work, the words have to be well chosen. Here is Hopkins limbering up, an attempt to capture an essence, staring at raindrops:

Drops of rain hanging on rails.... Blunt buds of the ash. Pencil buds of the beach. Lobes of the trees. Cups of the eyes. Gathering back the lightly hinged eyeballs. Bows of the eyelids, pencil of eyelashes.... Eyelids like leaves, petals, caps, tufted

hats, handkerchiefs, sleeves, gloves. Also of the bones sleeved in flesh. Juices of the sunrise....

All the teacher needs is an eye for images, photos, art works or experiences to draw that will lend themselves to writing.



It is worth adding that when children are selecting words and ideas, it is their reading that assists them. Their reading of poetry then becomes the yardstick for knowing what works and what does not. As one child said, 'you have to have something to hold it up against'. The reading of good writing helps them make a judgment when composing. Their reading becomes their internal critic – reading polices writing!

Sculpture into writing

Here is Debbie writing about a carving of a stone angel above a doorway (notice the influence of Dylan Thomas).

Angel faces

*We will wait for years
to crumble into dust.
Children come and go
but we remain.
We stand like spies
hidden in our cover of grimy moss*

*as silent as the air.
We are like the stars
staring down at the earth.
We are left to crumble, wither,
like a plant without water.
We are blind as moles
and deaf as the sky.
We are only stars.*

Debbie 10 yrs

Music into writing

I still use music to help me write. Some days, I like total silence but it is true that a well-chosen piece of music creates an atmosphere. It is worth experimenting with classical music – not music that has words as that will begin to predetermine what is written. I developed a writing idea that Nicola Stables tried out in a small village school in Yorkshire. One of the strings to her bow is that Nicola is a very capable classical musician. I asked her to play the children some classical music of her choosing. The children had to listen carefully and write on a piece of paper 6 key words that came to them as they listened. The words could be anything. They would then cut out their six words so they were armed with six small pieces of paper, a word on each. In the playground, everyone had to wait for a gust of wind and throw their words into the wind. Once the words were blown everywhere, they could run and find up to 5 words. These words then had to be used in their poems. I sent Nicola the poem below as I thought it might help the class by providing a structure.

When I Heard the Music.

*When I heard the music -
waves washed over my toes,*

*stars burst like glittering beads,
and a wall sprung up brick by brick.*

*When I heard the music -
I remembered a scarlet coat,
playing in sand dunes by the sea,
and my grandma nodding asleep.*

*When I heard the music -
I touched the cold skin of a frosty bottle,
the jagged spikes of winter,
and sunlight glowing
in a pumpkin.*

*When I heard the music
I dreamed of tapping stars into place,
melting moons and frozen slices of sun,
bright bars of delight
and frightened fishes
like tiny splinters
of electricity.*

*When I heard the music
I strode down the lanes
and marched over hillsides,
I threw wishes at clouds
and muffled my heart beat.....*

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On other projects, I have used selected pieces of music to write stories or accompany presentations of information on power-points.

Literature into writing

With one of my last classes, I read **The Hobbit**. Each child had a 'Hobbit' folder with a Hobbit hole design on the front cover. Inside the folder, we stored all the work that arose from our study of the novel. This included:

- Design a cosy Hobbit hole
- Invent your own dwarf's name and design a cloak
- List five magical items to take on a journey, e.g. cloak of silence
- Three things you might find in a troll's rucksack
- Three things in a wizard's bag
- advice for a burglar
- letter to persuade Bilbo to go on the journey from the dwarves
- map of the journey
- estate agents 'for sale' notice for Bilbo's home
- a contract for Mr Baggins
- Poem about Beorn the skin-changer
- Thoughts in the head of Bilbo at key moments, e.g. in the mountain
- riddles
- A letter home from Bilbo to gaffer
- Bilbo's diary at key moments
- Journal entries from the children – all in role as different dwarves
- Goblin's diary entry about the hobbits
- Interview with Gandalf
- Newspaper report about death of Smaug
- School report on Bilbo after the adventure was completed
- Obituary from dwarves killed
- A letter to Tolkien

I am the skin changer.

*At night, I dissolve
Into the golden dust
Of pixie wings.*

*I am the skin changer.
At night, I pull on
The skin of a rose petal.*

*I am the skin changer.
At night, I slide into
The scales of a poisonous pike.*

*I am the skin changer.
At night, I slither into
The cloud's silken hold.*

*I am the skin changer.
At night, I struggle into
The skin of an evil toad.*

Tim, 11 years

Here is an example of an information report about Hobbits. The same could be done for trolls, dwarves, dragons or elves.

A Significant group of people - including dwarfs - know Hobbits for being humble peace makers. Through out Hobbiton Hobbits have cemented their place in time as farmers yet there's more to know about these strange fellows

Due to their size of feet, pointy ears and curly hair, these hobbits are easy to identify. The chance of seeing ones in farms are big but mostly in meadows. Hobbits do a lot of things throughout their day: growing vegetables (Carrots, potatoes and beetroot), building (chopping wood and stacking it), and drinking beer. Hobbits (who are kind fellows) wear top black hats to cover their curly hair. The reason why they can't wear shoes is because their feet are too large and they cause blisters.

Nearly all Hobbits dwell in timber Shires: sturdy material is plentiful in the woods around the shire.

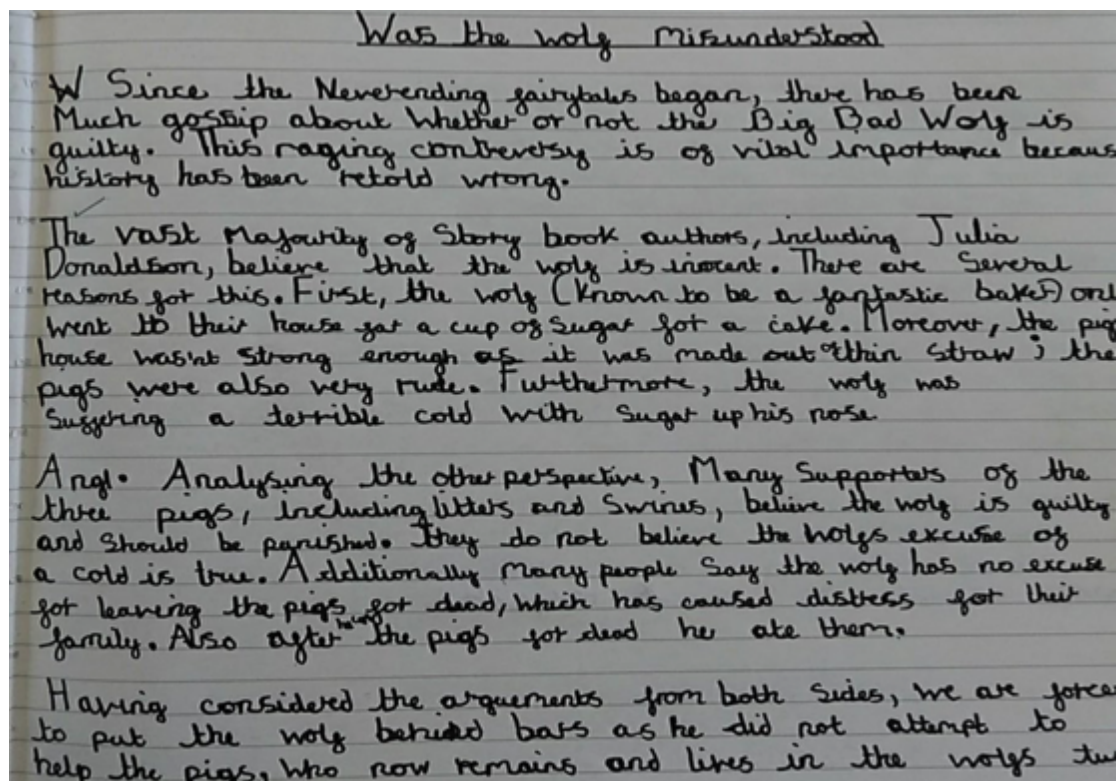
Hobbits wear a variety of clothes: Waist coats for fancy dinners; dresses, made of silk and cotton; and top hats.

We might use shortburst writing to leave persuasive messages for Bilbo or anyone else who we would like to tempt to join us on an adventure. Here is a rainbow inspector seeking a companion for a journey to the end of the never disappearing rainbow.

Firstly, can I start by introducing myself? My name is Alfred - a rainbow inspector. I am writing to persuade you to accompany me on a long journey to the end of the never disappearing rainbow, which has been around for days.

It is certain that with support, we can travel safely - to the end of the vibrant rainbow, said to

This next example is of a discussion piece around the suggestion that perhaps the wolf has been severely misjudged.

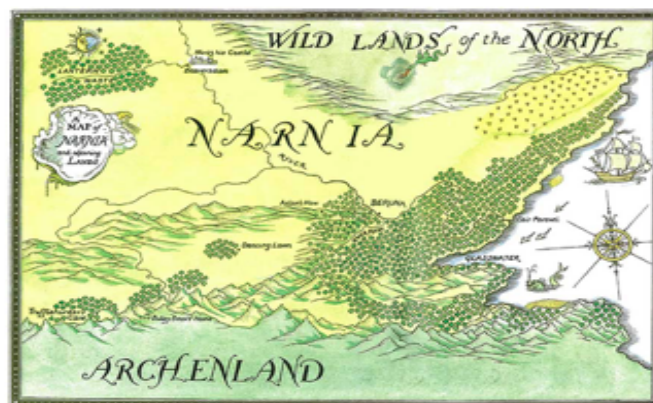


I spotted this marvelous 'transformation' of an open area into Narnia. These displays must take a long time and the cynical would probably suggest that they had little impact on the progress and standards but I do believe that they excite the imagination and make learning more memorable.



Narnia

Narnia is a magical land which can be entered by way of an enchanted wardrobe door.



Description

On first appearance, Narnia looks like any other temperate forest in winter. The hills and valleys are covered in dense coniferous woodland and there are many streams and rivers found across the landscape. Narnia has a large area of coastline with sandy beaches beneath steep rocky cliffs.

Inhabitants

It is the inhabitants of Narnia that make it remarkable. Intriguingly, there is no human population. Instead, the woodlands and hillsides are inhabited by a range of talking animals and enchanted creatures, such as: fauns, wolves, beavers, giants, dwarves, witches and even centaurs. The vast majority of these inhabitants live peacefully, however some are known to practise dark magic. In recent times, Narnia has been trapped in an endless winter by the most feared of these dangerous creatures.

The Narnia world is ripe with possibilities. Having enjoyed the book, create a long list with the children of writing possibilities and let them choose what they would be interested in writing, drawing on what you have taught them. Or, create the list as you read the book and use writing journals so that every Friday morning the children can plan, draft and edit their own choice. Here are some ideas:

- Diary entry or letter for any character
- Report about a mythical creature or real creature in the book
- Tourist guide to Narnia
- Five ways to travel to Narnia
- Rules for living as a good Narnian
- Draw a map of Narnia and mark in where the main events take place.
- Eye-witness account in role of a key event

When I first started teaching, I soon learned that children's writing was often stronger after a short drama session. They seemed to settle well to the writing and there was a contrast between the noisy energy of the active drama and the reflective silence of the writing. I could also see how the ideas and language used in the drama would often be drawn upon during their writing. I began using a flipchart during the drama so that if we were creating a scene using 'talking objects' then I would jot down descriptive phrases on the flipchart for the children to use when they wrote their own descriptions.

If we look at the picture book, 'I'll take you to Mrs Cole', we can begin to see the possibilities for independent writing arising from using images, discussion and drama. Take these two images from the middle of the book.

On the left we can see a small boy, looking somewhat alone/ forlorn, dwarfed by the buildings and staring at a house – what is he doing there? What is he



The next image in the book shows us a close-up of the front door. Here we can see a shadow.



We know that this is the same building as the first image because the gate is there, the overgrown garden but now we can see a dark shadow through the glass. And the door is being opened, with the unknown character leaning forwards as if to come outside. Who is it? What are they thinking? Have they noticed the boy? What are they going to say? Or do?

Here are my teaching notes for exploring the picture books through drama and setting the children up for them to independently write on the back of the drama, the discussion and the images. I could provide a clear focus, e.g. ‘Write a letter from the school about the boy to his Mum’. Or, I could leave the writing open to the children’s choice. During the sequence of lessons, I could provide the children with stopping points for them to take notes, write in role, record ideas and responses.

“I’ll take you to Mrs Cole” by Nigel Gray, illustrated by Michael Foreman

Start the book	Hide the cover as it rather gives the game away! However, tell them the title and ask, ‘what do you think the book might be about’? Revisit the ideas at the end. How does the author/illustrator change your thinking?
Dive into the image	Look at the two front piece images – loiter on the second picture and ask what they notice – he’s running up modern stairs in a dingy block and in the background is a fantasy building. Think about ‘play’ and ‘fantasy’ during the book.
Contrast and Compare	Compare the differences between the two houses – and study how the images and words contrast.
Rumours Freeze frame Eavesdrop	<i>What do the school children say about Mrs Cole?</i> Everyone in the playground has heard about Mrs Cole (or imagines they have). In role, the children move around, creating, gathering and sharing tales, gossip and rumours. The scene of children in the playground chatting is now frozen, (freeze frame) and the teacher passes through the scene. Whoever the teacher passes nearby, thaws and speaks aloud, so that all can hear snippets of the ‘overheard conversations’. Once the teacher has passed by, the speakers stop talking and freeze again.
Perhaps	Stop on the image of the dungeon and invent with the children some more “perhaps’ sentences.

Talking to Mrs Cole Thoughts in the Head	Stop on the image where they go to Mrs Cole's house but do not go in. In pairs - what would you say to Mrs Cole's face – and what would you say behind her back? Freeze the scene with the dog, the boy and the Mum outside Mrs Cole's house – what are they thinking might happen, what has happened, what hopes or regrets do they have?
Speaking picture	<i>What do we think Mrs Cole might be like?</i> In turn, children enter the centre of a circle, adding themselves to a single, collective still image of Mrs Cole. As each person gets into position, they speak a descriptive sentence, (as the part of Mrs Cole), e.g. <i>'I am her skin, rough as sandpaper.'</i>
Conscience Alley	<i>Should he go into Mrs Cole's house?</i> Stop at the image of the boy outside Mrs Cole's house when he has run away. The class makes two lines, facing each other. The teacher or a child in role walks between the lines. Those in one line try to persuade to go in whereas those on the other line try to persuade him to go home.
Feelings Graph Tell Me	Now read all the way through to the end and then track the boy's feelings on a graph using visual and textual evidence. Discuss using 'tell me' approach: preferences, questions, inferences, etc.
Speaking Objects	<i>What can be/has been/will be seen inside the different homes</i> Contrast the two main rooms from the different houses. Work in two groups in 2 circles. Children individually enter the circle and place themselves as an inanimate object, e.g. <i>chair, table</i>, etc. They enter the space, stating what object they are and what they have seen or heard or what they think/ feel about life in the house. This could be done using sentence stems such as , <i>'I can see..... I can hear... I wonder.....'</i>. Then the teacher moves around each room and the objects speak directly as she passes.
Improvisation Writing-in-role Phone Call	<i>What is the conversation between the boy and his Mum after the story ends – and what is the conversation between both Mums?</i> Small groups improvise the scene when some of Mrs Cole's children take the boy home and meet his mum. Write the boy's diary entry about what happened when he ran away and went into Mrs Cole's. In role as Mum or Mrs Cole, children sit backtoback and ring a friend to gossip or improvise a phone call between the two mums.

Bus Stop	Create a bus stop and queue. Children come into the queue, one by one, each taking a different role – Mum, the boy, Mrs Cole or one of the children. Waiting for the bus, everyone gets chatting.
Eye Witness	In pairs, one child was an eye-witness of the day when the boy first visited Mrs Cole's house. The other was not present and wants to find out more, through questioning.
Performance Carousel	The children are now in groups of 4. They create a still image that matches a scene from the story. These are presented as dream images and may be symbolic rather than realistic representations. In turn they rise up, move and speak before sinking back down and freezing. This is followed by the next group and so on. Work out with the children the main scenes, e.g. 1 The pirate ship game. 2 The bath game. 3 The awful house of Mrs Cole. 4 Running away. 5 Outside Mrs Cole's. 6 Inside Mrs Cole's house/ Feeding the rabbits. 7 The end These scenes can be presented in turn with no break between them, as a continuous performance sequence. A sentence is spoken aloud as a caption for the scene.
Evaluation	Children discuss and write about the story – what do they think the story is about? What is the main theme – support their ideas with evidence from the text? Which Mum is kind? <i>© Pie Corbett 2016.</i>

Children should be studying film for at least one unit during each year. The literacy shed provides a possible bank of many excellent short films. We should also be looking at full length films and treating them rather like a novel with stopping places for drama, discussion, reading the accompanying novel (if there is one) and writing. The short film 'The Lighthouse' from the Literacy Shed provides a simple example for what might be done. The children could:

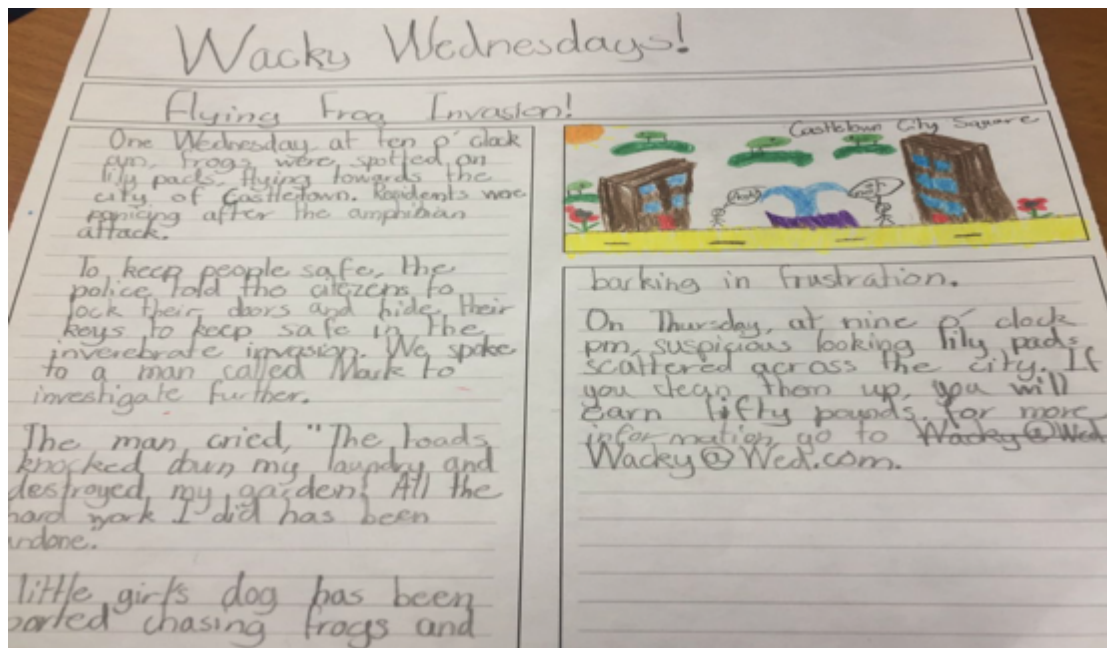
- write the story of what happened from the viewpoint of the lighthouse keeper/ the ship's captain/ a cabin boy or one of the villagers;
- the event could be written up as a newspaper article or the keeper's log;

- write a poem about ‘the storm’;
- write explanations of other ideas for saving the ship;
- write a list with ‘ten ways to stop a lighthouse keeper from being bored’;
- find out about lighthouses and write a fact file;
- design the perfect lighthouse.;
- write the story that explains why the keeper is alone in the lighthouse, etc.



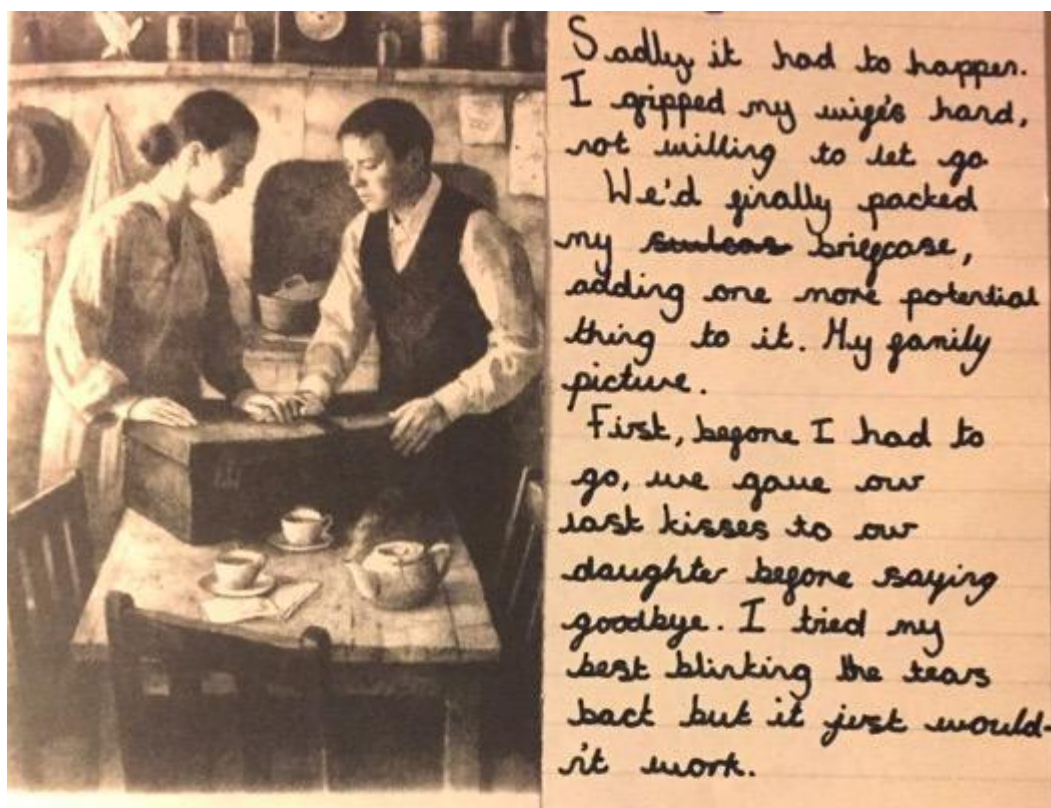
The Spiderwick Chronicles provides a great model for report writing in Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide. These could be added to by the children inventing new species such as the Southern Lesser Spotted Toad Goblin. Of course, to do this they will need to have learned and have in their long-term memory the structure and language patterns needed to write effectively.

Here is an example of a newspaper report based on the picture book Tuesday.



David Wiesner, Shaun Tann and Anthony Browne all create picture books that lend themselves as remarkable stimuli to the imagination. Take 'Voices in the Park' and the children could respond in many ways:

- write diary entries in role as different characters;
- write a short play with the characters at a bus stop;
- write letters between the two children;
- what happened from a park keeper's viewpoint;
- write a letter from the father persuading the mother to let the children play together – and then write the reply;
- create the newspaper that the man is reading;
- write a letter that the mother has in her handbag;
- predict what will happen to the four main characters;
- write about the adults from the dog's view!
- write a 'transformation list poem' in which park objects turn into other things, e.g. *In the park, the roundabout becomes / a Catherine wheel sending out golden sparks. In the park, a tree becomes / a flame shimmering in the autumn air.*

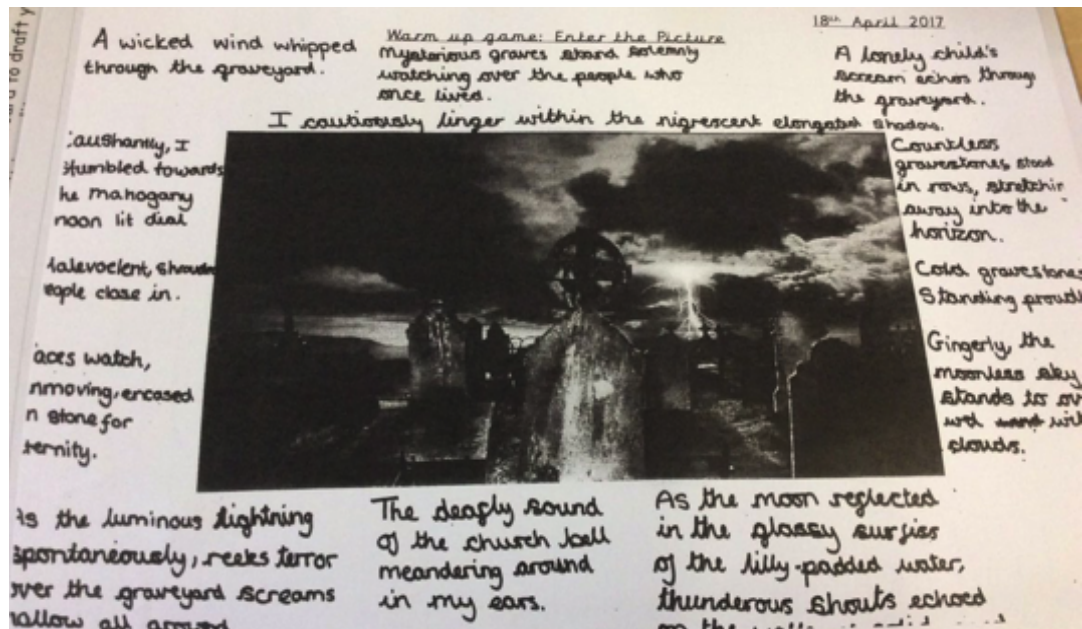


This elegant piece of writing has come from studying Shaunn Tann's 'The Arrival'. The challenge to write the page that goes with an image has lent itself to this moving, first person narrative.

The Adventures of Harris Burdick is a wonderful book that consists of a sequence of unrelated and rather disturbing images. Let the children choose one image to use as a basis for writing. For example:

- If the chosen image is the front cover, what would the story title be? Write the story;
- Put 2 images together and link them;
- Write the story about Harris Burdick, explaining why he never returned!
- Take an image and write just the paragraph that goes with it. Then write the paragraph before and what happened next so that you have a mini story of 3 paragraphs.

In this case, an image has been selected that is related to the novel, 'Moondial'. An initial, independent brainstorm will help the child to create their own description.



There is something magical about using objects. We do this with small children but by the time children move into Key Stage 2, we have forgotten the power of the real object. This image shows a class that is studying The Highwayman.



This photo shows a girl holding an old jar and using this to invent a story. Where is it? Whose is it? What are they doing. This happened during a trip to a local museum. Every child selected a different object as a story trigger.



With my second year 3 class, I played them the beginning of 'Under Milk Wood' by Dylan Thomas, read aloud by Richard Burton. Everyone draw maps of their invented village. They wrote diary entries, descriptions and even the contents of the postman's bag – letters, postcards and a telegram. Thomas's incantations are direct invitations into the play but also into creating your own visions, '*Only you can hear...*' and '*Only you can see...*'. Interestingly, listening to such a fine reading and our gentle choral chanting of the opening seemed to stay in their writing rhythms and crept out on many other occasions. It was as if we had somehow placed Thomas's genius irrevocably inside of their imaginative and linguistic competency.

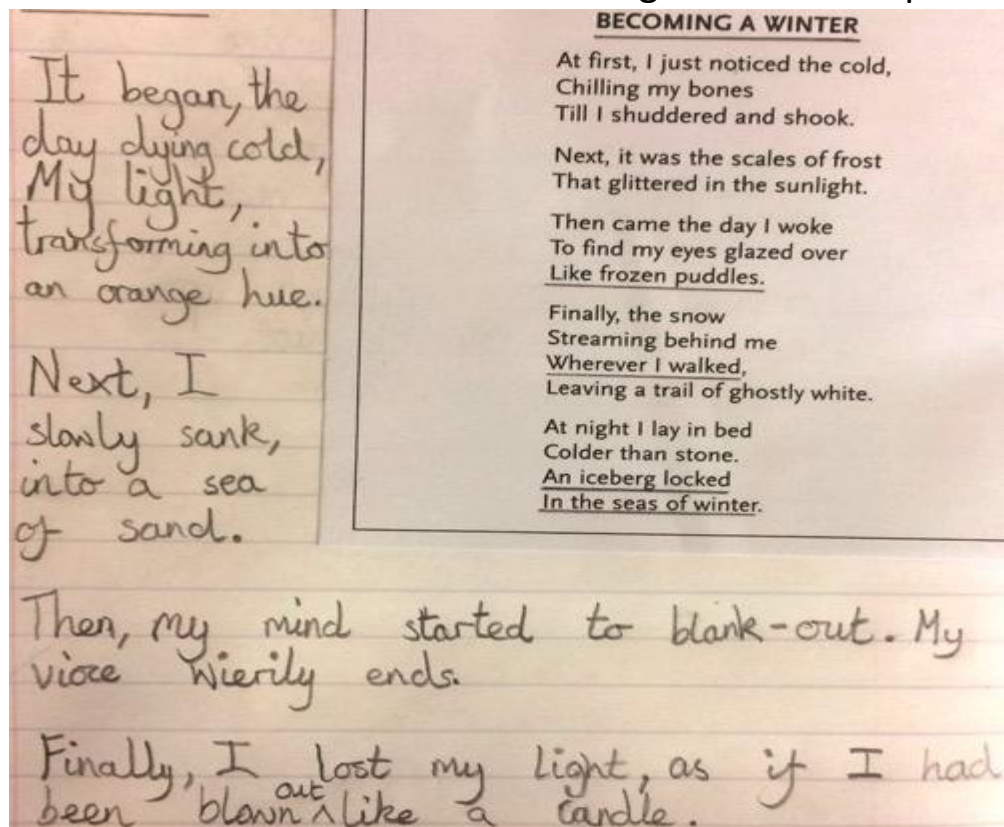
One year, in a village school where I taught 35 children from 6 to 11 years old, we created a display for another small school. What would they be interested in? Children decided on what they would do, spent time writing and drawing. On the allotted day, I drove tour display to the other school and returned with their display. My class were quite critical about what was worth

reading, how well the writing was executed, appreciating most of all a section of jokes!

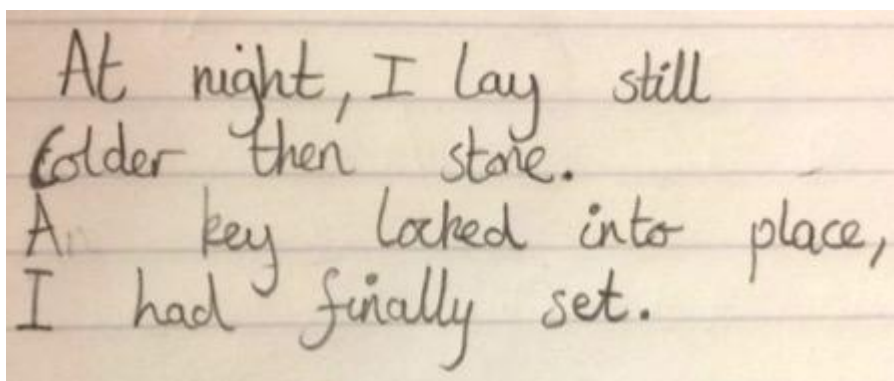
It is one thing to love the story Owl Babies but when we actually have owls in the classroom then the story begins to come alive in a total different way. These sorts of exciting events not only deepen understanding of the story, add to children's general knowledge but also act as a great stimulus for their writing. This could be 'killed' by producing success criteria, objectives, and all the other deadening paraphernalia of the modern classroom. Most children will want to draw, make clay models, paint and write about what happened when the owls came to visit and what the owl man told them!



Finally, using a model for writing; sometimes it is enough to provide a model and see where children decide to take their writing. In this instance, the teacher has provided my poem 'Becoming A Winter' (which I write as it was a misreading of the words 'Becoming a Writer'). This child decided to write about the sun setting. Where we have a focus, a stimulus, and the children write without direct teaching then it is independent.



The poem ends:



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