

Creative Planning with Whole Texts

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A digital resource to accompany this Minibook
is available at <http://bit.ly/2BwP6wf>

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A literature-based approach to planning

The aim of this Minibook is to provide guidance on how to approach planning around a text in the primary school, with a particular focus on fictional texts. Consideration is given to what to look for when choosing texts, the types of teaching approaches likely to engage children and the linked language and literacy opportunities which can emerge when using these. This approach can excite learners, support teachers in developing their pedagogy and support schools in building an engaging English curriculum with literature at its heart.

Rationale

Carefully chosen literature placed at the centre of the literacy curriculum has the capacity to engage and inspire both children and teachers. It can provide an exciting and inclusive context for a range of speaking, listening, reading and writing activities. By reading books aloud and pausing at key moments to explore stories in depth through talk, drama and arts based approaches, children can become totally immersed in the story world. Through active participation children's enjoyment, understanding and emotional engagement with the experiences of the characters will increase, as this comment from a Year 3 teacher indicates:

'It is lovely when they get so caught up with the book. It is real to them. They start thinking like the characters.'

The focus here is on narrative in a variety of forms - picturebooks, novels, traditional story, literary non-fiction and film. Narrative is a fundamental means by which we make sense of our world and our experiences (Hardy, 1977:12) and the 'groundbase' of children's literature in the primary school (Meek Spencer in Barrs and Cork, 2001:15).

The importance of literature goes beyond the benefits for children's language and literacy development. This is acknowledged within The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013:3), which notes the key role reading and literature

in particular play in children's development - culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Through fiction children can experience books which reflect their own thoughts and feelings or which extend their thinking by introducing new viewpoints (Cremin, 2009:101). Research into cognitive approaches to children's literature indicates that through literature children can develop their theory of mind and empathy as they explore how fictional characters think and feel (Kidd and Costano, 2013; Nikolajeva, 2013). Fictional worlds can provide exciting contexts for a range of purposeful writing and creative work that will not only draw children into a particular book and associated literacy activities, but also help them see the pleasure that books and reading can bring (O'Sullivan and McGonigle, 2010).

It is no surprise that children and young people who read for pleasure score more highly in reading tests. National Literacy Trust research has shown an identifiable link between reading, reading behaviour and attainment (Clark, 2013:20). It has also been shown that 'reading for pleasure', defined by Bearne and Reedy as '[p]ersonal motivation and engagement in reading which leads to sustained voluntary reading' (2018:146), is not only associated with higher reading attainment but also with cognitive success more generally, and that the effect of this continues as children grow up (Sullivan and Brown, 2013). However, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) produced every five years has raised concerns about children in England and their attitudes to books and reading. Although the situation is improving, the 2016 PIRLS study still shows that 20% of children in England, more than the international average, report disliking reading (DfE, 2017:102). In terms of attainment, a poverty gap is indicated. The characteristics identified as most strongly predictive of PIRLS performance in 2016 include the number of books the pupil has in their home and their socio-economic status (as determined by historical free-school-meal eligibility) (DfE, 2017:15).

Other studies have indicated that reading engagement is more important than socio-economic background for children's progress as readers (OECD, 2002). As Smith (2016) powerfully points out, children's literature has the potential to close the attainment gap and achieve equity. This has implications not only for resourcing – Smith, for example, suggests 'flooding' nurseries and schools with books and stories - but also for the responsibility of educators to introduce and explore books in the classroom that will

challenge and inspire young learners. A ‘reimagining’ of the English curriculum (Moss, 2017:63) with a central role for literature is an opportunity to address this. The importance of sharing and exploring literature with children should not be underestimated:

Children’s literature is where children learn to live. It is that important and it deserves a central place in the curriculum. (Smith, 2016:14)

The following chapters provide a guide to working with literature creatively in the primary classroom. Chapter 3 introduces the types of teaching approaches which might be used to explore texts. Chapter 4 outlines how to go about planning round a complete text, with particular focus on a novel. This process is exemplified further in Chapter 5 which describes a teaching sequence based on a picturebook. Chapter 6 considers developing writing within a text based approach. The first step is to consider how to choose suitable texts. This is the focus of Chapter 2.

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