

Hook, line, and sinker

by Jamie Thomas, Teacher and Talk for Writing trainer

Whether you're after inside hooks, outside hooks, role play hooks or experience hooks, Talk for Writing Trainer, Jamie Thomas, has it all covered and shares his hook ideas

Seeing thirty sets of eyes widen in intrigue and excitement has always motivated me as a teacher. Whether it be as enchanting as a fairy door, as immersive as a trip to the seaside or as shocking as the remnants of a disgusting beast visiting the classroom, an imaginative 'hook' always engages the children.

But do not think that this is merely a bit of fun to begin a topic, for a hook is far more than that. It can be a gateway into a child's imagination. It can allow them time to dwell on something and consider a life away from their own. It can be an experience, quite possibly like nothing they have ever witnessed before or an object that fires up the curiosity in their belly.



Jamie Thomas



When I first began Talk for Writing, two of Pie's signature sentences stuck in my brain. They were: 'you can't create or imagine something out of nothing' and 'imagination is the manipulation of what you already know.' This is so true! In a world where many children fail to stop and look at the amazing things that are all around them, it is our responsibility to open their eyes and take note. A cleverly manufactured hook will not only capture their imagination, it will also potentially provide a purpose and audience for their writing.

Below are some suggestions of some simple hooks to whet your appetite, taken straight out of the classroom. And remember – whilst creating Narnia is an amazing feat and one to be proud of, we all deserve time to rest and relax and take in the wonderful world all around us.

Ideas for Hooks

Outside hooks

- a crime scene is created with a number of clues to whet the appetite, a disaster strikes e.g. Santa's sleigh crash
- animal tracking – footprints / devastation / nests / etc.
- a mystery object is set in the middle of the playground
- music playing on the playground
- act out a scene on the playground as children arrive at school (e.g. a search for a missing dog)



- washing cars to understand process and procedure
- a treasure hunt / scavenger hunt (clues/riddles)

Inside hooks

- a crime scene is created with a number of clues to whet the appetite
- animal tracking – footprints / devastation / nests / etc.
- chalk dust footprints
- trash the classroom (vandalism / a monster has visited)
- remove all technology from the classroom to travel back in time
- dress up in period costume
- set a DT challenge connected to a story (e.g. make a gingerbread house or build a house out of straw etc.)

Objects

- story boxes with key objects from the story
- mini fairy doors set around the school
- a whole-school theme (e.g. all red objects scattered around the school)

Communications

- a letter or email arrives
- a message arrives from a character in a story
- the teacher receives an urgent message / phone call
- pick out intriguing words and phrases from a story and float them on a screen / share them in envelopes. What do you think will happen in our story?
- an external agent comes in seeking advice (e.g. builders asking questions about building materials for 3 Little Pigs)
- a local police officer is in interviewing the children about an incident that took place over the weekend

Role Play

- a visit from the characters in a book
- role playing a scene (actors / teachers / children)
- an 'expert' visits the school (e.g. a dragon hunter)
- teachers dress up and act out / retell the story

Experience

- tap into the focus e.g. for fear, encourage children to explore their own fears by feeling a mystery object in a box such as an eyeball (slime and a ping pong ball)
- music – link the emotions of the story to a piece of music
- design and make an essential object in the story (e.g. shoes for the Elves and the Shoemaker)

- visit the setting (e.g. the beach / a cave / etc.)

Technology

- super impose a dragon / beast / etc. onto an everyday setting: FxGuru / Action Movie
- show the children CCTV footage of a key event (e.g. a robbery in school)
- use green screen technology to set up a news reel / report
- use Google X-Ray goggles to 'soft-hack' a website and set up 'fake news'
- set up an audio or video stream in the classroom that drip-feeds noises/words to raise curiosity/build suspense