



## Writing toolkits – story secrets

The key areas in narrative that children might benefit from writing toolkits are:

1. **Characterisation** and **dialogue**
2. **Description** – people, places, objects, creatures
3. **Dilemma - suspense** and **action**
4. Crafting the **opening** and **ending**

Don't work on everything at once – just select a focus. Model ideas, to influence the class version of a story. Then ask children to work in pairs or individually. Of course, if you are working with reception children then you need to know the toolkit – how to create suspense – but the children do not need to know this. However, as children move into year 1, they can increasingly begin to step outside of writing and understand how specific effects are created. Story 'toolkits' for year 1 children would have fewer key points than year 2. Translate the toolkits by using 'what the children say' and ensure that they are co-constructed from children's reading of the model and other examples. Year 2 toolkits might include some of these sorts of ideas – but remember, keep the toolkits limited, clear and easy to understand. Your co-constructed toolkits may end up looking like these.

### 1. Characterisation – you might want to

- Choose a good name
- Use a few descriptive details
- Talk about their hobby or main interest
- Think about how the character feels and why, e.g. *angry* – or what type are they, e.g. *bossy or shy*
- Show this through what they say or do
- What is their desire/goal, e.g. *she wants a pet*
- Develop and change character beginning to the end

### 2. Dialogue – you might want to

- Think about how they feel
- Use powerful speech verbs
- Use said + adverb
- Insert stage direction to show what a character is doing when speaking, e.g. "No," he hissed, *shaking his head in disgust.*
- Use only a few exchanges

### 3. Description – people, places, objects – you might want to

- Use well-chosen adjectives, similes/metaphor
- Use senses and concrete detail
- Show things through the character's eyes, e.g. *she stared at...*
- Describe only key objects
- Describe settings to create atmosphere
- Describe the weather and time of day

#### 4. Openings – what sort of start do you want?

- Traditional – *Once upon a time*
- Time – *Early one morning...*
- How a character feels – *Mandy felt sad.*
- Character – *Bill stared at the goblin and smiled.*
- Setting – *The forest was cold in winter...*
- Action – *Jo ran.*
- Talk – *'Put that down!'*
- Use a 'hook' – *Usually, John enjoyed walking to school but...*

#### 5. Endings – what sort of ending do you want?

- Show character's feelings – *Bill grinned.*
- Comment on what has been learned – *They knew it had been stupid...*

#### 6. Dilemma - action and suspense

- Think about the character's goal – how will they try to achieve this – and what 'struggles' will they meet on the way – conflicts, obstacles and problems. Don't have too many!
- Decide how obstacles will be overcome.

#### To build tension and excitement: – you might want to

- Balance short and long sentences
- Use questions to draw reader in
- Use exclamations for impact
- Place your character in lonely, dark place
- Introduce a scary sound effect, e.g. *something hissed*
- Show a glimpse of something, e.g. *a hand appeared at the door*
- Use dramatic connectives, e.g. *at that moment...*
- Use empty words, e.g. *something, somebody, it*
- Use powerful verbs, e.g. *run, jump, grip, grab, struggle*