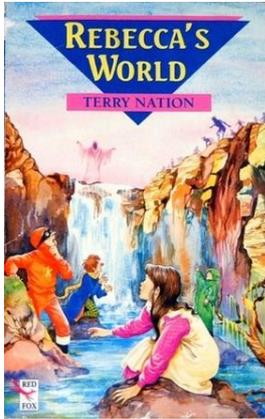


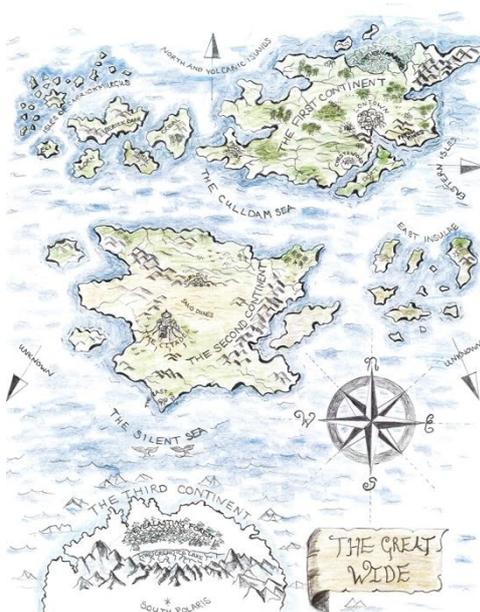


## Maps & Storytelling – Vashti Hardy



I've always had a visual imagination. The first longer book read to me by a teacher in school was *Rebecca's World* by Terry Nation, a book that changed everything for me. I can still see the pink fog as though I was stepping into the story alongside Rebecca as she embarked on an adventure in a strange new world. I realised then that imagination was like having a superpower; through story you can go anywhere and make anything possible – it's a Tardis of infinite possibility. I knew at the point of reading *Rebecca's World* that one day I wanted to create stories, to build worlds beyond the confines of our own, where I could journey beyond what is, and imagine what could be.

It took me many years to make that dream a realisation, and there were times I felt it wasn't something that someone 'ordinary' like me could do. Surely writers were special beings whose words flowed off their pens in some magical way? It was in my twenties that I read something that Philip Pullman had written that again changed my outlook. It went something along the lines of, "*When people see the finished book, they see the swan gliding gracefully along the surface. What they don't see are the feet kicking furiously beneath the water.*" Reading this shifted my thought process. Nobody finds it straightforward to write a book; we all have to work hard at our pursuits, whatever they may be. Pullman's words gave me the extra nudge I needed; it's all right to have a go, for it to be hard – that's completely normal.



As I've grown as a writer, one of the most interesting things I've discovered is that writing is about so much more than 'writing'. This may sound like a strange thing to say, but what I mean is that writing goes far beyond the physical act of writing. My process is probably split 50/50 between physical writing and another side: the blue sky thought time and other creative inputs. Among other things, these include listening to music, collecting images on Pinterest, and a particular favourite of mine: drawing maps.

Drawing a map of the story world is one of the first things I do when starting a new project. When I read a story, I want to feel transported into the world; I don't

want to feel that there are fuzzy edges or blank spaces. I want to be immersed and truly *believe*, in the way that we are all, at some time in our lives, drawn to push the back of the wardrobe on the off chance that it might be today that we finally get into Narnia. That's what good story tellers do for me: they breathe life into the impossible and make it exist. So, as part of making my worlds begin to 'exist', I draw a map. It's also a useful way to plot out the story visually. A map gives me a sense of what's possible and what the parameters and time scales could be too.

The most popular workshop I run in schools is fantasy map making. I find the children throw themselves into the activity and adore the opportunity of taking their own ideas and creating their own worlds, driven by their particular interests and passions. It's a great way of engaging the children who might not usually see themselves as 'writers', and showing them that there are different ways into story telling. I support the children with an input and imagery and some map-creation tips, and I always find they fly. I adore talking to them about their ideas as they work and they are always keen to share. By including three or more potential hazards or obstacles on their character's journeys, children discover that they have plotted out an entire story arc without writing a word. Seeing the children enthused, teachers often run with this and sometimes shift their upcoming planning so that the children can go on to write their stories. Freedom and ownership is a powerful thing.



This is something that teachers may like to try themselves. If you've read *Brightstorm* as a class, you could set an activity where children create their own fantasy maps based on *Brightstorm*, imagining that they are drawing a new world for the crew of the *Aurora* to explore. Ask them to include at least three hazard points on the map, for example, a volcano that erupts with magic spells, a forest of lost memories, the bottomless chasm of doom (that type of thing!). Children decide where home/the starting point is and where/what the goal is (to reach an island no-one has set foot on, to retrieve a lost explorer etc.). There are various levels of challenge according to ability, for example, some children may measure the journey to scale and add this to their map, or consider climate variables and how this affects the type of hazards. They could imaginatively select

vocabulary to evoke a sense of time and place, and apply standard geographical map features such as direction and landmarks.

There are many activities that could lead in or follow on from this. Here are some ideas:

- Research and analyse a range of fantasy maps from books.
- Use *Brightstorm* or *Darkwhispers* maps to mark on key events in the story (for classes who have read these as a class novel).
- Create a class Pinterest board or scrapbook of pictures to inspire possible story events e.g. natural hazards, mythical creatures.
- Research commonly used real world map features.
- Write a hazardous scene from their own fantasy adventure stories based on their maps, or the complete story.
- Create a glossary for your fantasy world.
- Begin their own creative writing journals – unmarked spaces where they can collect images, jot story ideas, draw maps, design cover art, free write etc.
- Create playlists for their stories to aid with writing the scene – e.g. listen to movie soundtracks to evoke certain moods within a story: the call to adventure, danger, sadness, joy, saying goodbye, fun etc. Examples I would recommend are the soundtracks from the Narnia films, *How to Train Your Dragon*, Harry Potter and so on!

I hope you enjoy trying out some of the activities and that perhaps some of your young writers, who may often find the process tricky, begin to see that writing can be a multi-creative process and a huge amount of fun!

Vashti Hardy



*Vashti Hardy is a writer of children's books living near Brighton in Sussex with her husband and three teens. She was a primary school teacher for several years, and has a special interest in children's writing, especially free-writing and the use of journals and creating fantasy worlds.*

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