

The Tiger's Eye



Film and notes for a staff meeting on short-burst creative writing

The film to use with these notes can be found here

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8mBTQthl3g&t=0m5s>

Section 1

Ask teachers to observe the film clip till 3.58 and make notes. Explain that I am teaching the audience as if they were a class – putting them into the role of the learner. Listen to the film clip.

Stop the film at 3.58 just after I have read the final three lines aloud. Ask colleagues to share their ideas and make a list on a flip chart, commenting as you see fit. Typical points to arise would be:

- The teaching assistant is making the word bank
- Children use magpie books (small vocabulary books) to gather words and ideas
- The spine of words creates a very strong scaffold for the writing
- Using a visual stimulus makes it easier to create
- Pushing the 'class' for alternative ideas so that they are in the habit of 'generating' possibilities rather than just writing down the first thought that comes into their heads
- Prompting the use of techniques, e.g. similes
- Use of paired talk to generate ideas
- The importance of learning to 'listen to each other'
- Boys enjoy writing and being 'clever' with words – as well as the appeal of writing something brief
- Use of praise – a 'can do' atmosphere
- Focusing children onto what has to be written about next, e.g. we need a word to describe the lashes

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- Sneaking in grammar, e.g. we need an adjective
- Balance 'generating' ideas with 'judging' which idea is best, e.g. which sounds best 'snowy lashes are quivering or snowy lashes quiver'?
- Constant commenting on the writing, e.g. 'short, tight, punchy sentence'
- Drawing children's attention to using other senses, e.g. what might the fur feel like?
- Don't be afraid to suggest words and ideas, e.g. 'thick ... velvety'
- Leave pauses for thinking but also move at a pace
- Constant rereading to 'hear what it sounds like'
- 'it's up to you – make children feel that it is their composition
- 'let's try that out' – experiment with ideas to see how they sound.

There are two extra points that might be worth making.

- a. In a classroom setting, I would push the children much more to generate plenty of possibilities. The brainstorm needs to be gathered rapidly and be fairly extensive.
- b. After a while, children do not need to write the spine down. You have trained them how to look at an experience and then write about it, noticing key details. The spine idea is a simple way to help children who have yet to be taught how to write description.

Section 2

Ask them why they think this sort of writing might be important or helpful as part of developing children as writers. Share ideas and flipchart them – then listen to the film again, with colleagues taking notes, from 3.59, pausing at 6.35.

Let colleagues discuss in pairs and then make a list of points that have arisen, e.g.

- 'to write a story you need to be able to describe scenes and events to create a picture of what is happening inside a reader's mind'
- word banks need to be put on the washing line
- a short-burst piece could be drawn upon later when writing a narrative
- brainstorming before writing to gather words and ideas is an important part of teaching writing
- if you can't write a pleasing sentence then you are not going to be able to write a whole text
- short-burst writing helps children 'limber up' as a writer.

Section 3

The next section from 6.36 – 8.54 is a series of 4 examples. It might be worth pausing on each one and reading it aloud.

- a. Kerry's poem about the icicle was written after going outside, looking at some icicles. We then made a brainstorm of words/ideas. Following writing a class poem, everyone drew an icicle shape and wrote a shape poem.
- b. Mark's hand poem was written after drawing our hands. I began this session by drawing my own hand on a board so everyone could see how I was doing it. Time was then spent with everyone drawing carefully. We then made a list of words and ideas and similes – before shared writing leading into independent writing. The process of teaching drawing is similar to writing – and of course drawing before writing means that children have observed very closely.
- c. Debbie's poem 'Angel Faces' won the Poetry Society's young poets competition. In the poem I can hear the influence of Dylan Thomas. Only a few weeks beforehand we had been listening to Richard Burton reading the opening of 'Under Milkwood'. It is a good example of independent writing and shows the pay off from plenty of shared writing and quality reading.
- d. Natalie's poem was written about a painting. Again, this is an unaided piece of independent writing. The children were asked to select a postcard of a painting to write about. It is worth collecting postcards of paintings so that on some occasions everyone can choose something different.

Section 4

The final section starts at 8.55 and focuses on 'What are the children learning?' Before watching what I have to say, ask colleagues to make a list of what they think is being taught. Then listen to the final section of the film and compare their ideas with mine:

Basic writing toolkit

- the ability to generate and judge – using powerful words
- how to choose fresh word combinations and avoid clichés
- using alliteration to create sound effects
- using similes, metaphors and personification to create images
- building up a range of strategies and things that you can do in your writing – a bank of possibilities in writing so that children learn that you can: ask questions, describe things, create a riddle, tease the reader, invent new ideas, turn objects into creatures, etc.
- the ability to brainstorm words and ideas.

Section 5

End the session by explaining that short-burst writing is not just writing a 3-line spine poem. Perhaps colleagues could list ideas. It could be:

- a list poem, e.g. *In my magic box*
- a descriptive spine poem – or any other sort of poem

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- a narrative paragraph, e.g. a suspense paragraph
- a short piece of non-fiction, e.g. a persuasive note to the tooth fairy complaining that 10p per tooth is not enough as the recession is biting!

The idea is that children should be writing daily. Short-burst writing at key stage 2 might be a matter of having a daily half hour writing workshop which includes a starting point (an image, object, film clip, audio clip, etc.) – brainstorm – shared writing – independent writing – sharing. This is especially useful when there are days where children might not be writing during literacy.

End by asking colleagues to discuss where they might use this strategy and build the approach into their plans.

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