



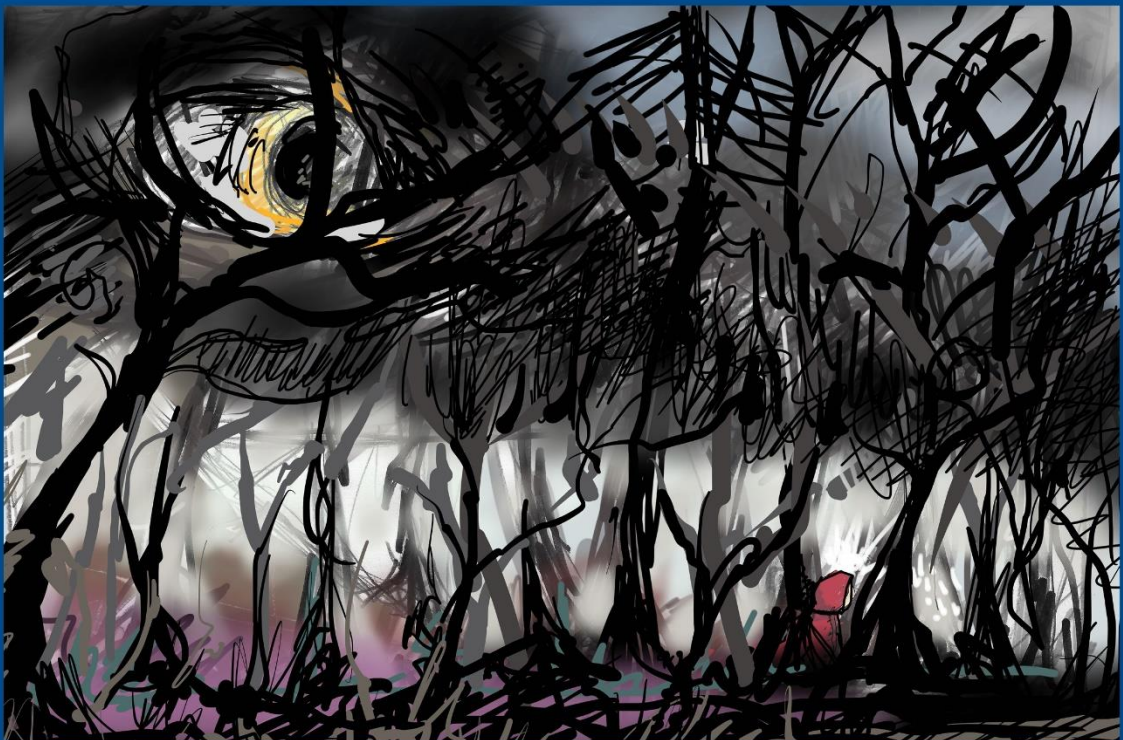
TalkforWriting™

Talk for Writing Home-school booklet

Red

Working at greater depth

by Jamie Thomas



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Introduction

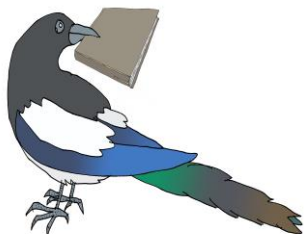
Little Red Riding Hood is a fairy tale about a young girl and a Big Bad Wolf. Although there have been many adaptations of this childhood classic, the most well-renowned being that of the brothers Grimm, the earliest known printed version was entitled *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, in 1697, by Charles Perrault.

I have always loved taking a story I know really well and considering how I could manipulate it to change its meaning or impact on the reader. The levels of sophistication are endless. You can change the order of events, retelling from a different character's perspective, swap the protagonist, alter the genre or the text type ... the list goes on.

When I first met Pie, I remember him saying, "Imagination is the manipulation of what you know." This is at the heart of what I think storytelling is all about – being playful with the stories and plots that we know and love. Our focus throughout this unit is to consider how we can take a story designed for a younger audience and adapt it for older readers.

Preparing to write

As an author, it is highly recommended that you keep a jotter or notebook, otherwise known as a *magpie book*, by your side to capture any ideas you may have as the unit unfolds. This book can be used to make notes, jot down ideas and draft initial thoughts. *Red* is a story that is rich in imagery, designed to evoke emotion in the



reader. As we explore the story, we will pause and consider how it has been created. Noting down these tools, testing them out for yourself and trying to identify them in other fiction will greatly enhance your skills as a writer.



Activity 1: Tuning in to the genre

Before we read the story, I want you to tune in to the genre we are exploring.

- ★ Watch this wonderful short animation, entitled *Chaperon Rouge*:
<https://www.literacyshed.com/chaperon-rouge.html>
- ★ In your jotter, write down your initial responses to the animation. You may like to reflect on some of the following elements:
 - what you enjoyed or disliked
 - what surprised, puzzled or intrigued you
 - what unanswered questions you still have
 - how the animation made you feel
 - what other stories it may have reminded you of
 - what themes lie at the heart of the story
- ★ Now, let's read the story, *Red*. You can listen to this being read aloud here: <https://soundcloud.com/talkforwriting/red/s-pgmsBkkwTq6>

Red

"Don't stray from the path!"

Skipping through the forest, Red, so named because of her favourite cloak, recognised the familiar smell of the lush flowers that she passed every week. The stone-laid path meandered through tall, majestic trees, forming a canopy of serenity.

Red stopped to pick a handful of the gently nodding daffodils that flanked the path to her Grandmother's house. As she crouched, a gentle breeze filled her nostrils with a waft of unfamiliar perfume. 'What is that?' Red pondered.

Staring inquisitively towards the undergrowth, her mother's words echoed meaninglessly, yet continuously, around in her head: "Don't stray from the path!" But why should she always listen to her

mother? Surely one look couldn't hurt, could it? Overcome with curiosity, Red stepped from the path.

Parting the emerald leaves, Red's eyes sparkled with excitement. In front of her, handfuls of pink confetti drifted down from the boughs of majestic cherry trees; joyous birdsong twittered above her, harmonising the melodic humming of the bees. She could feel her heart racing in anticipation and wondered what other treasures lay beyond the path. In the distance, a lake of dancing primroses enticed her further in; her mother's words were now lost.

Deeper and deeper Red walked, transfixed by the exquisite offerings of the forest. Deeper and deeper she walked, unaware of the world changing around her. Deeper and deeper she walked, until nothing was recognisable. The trees, once a canopy of serenity, now formed foreboding tunnels, suppressing all life in their thorny grasp. The forest floor, once a blazing carpet of confetti, was now a complex maze of brambles and thorns, tearing at Red's vulnerable ankles. The birdsong had stopped; the silence was deafening.

All of a sudden, Red felt like something or someone was watching her; she sensed its presence. An uncontrollable shiver ran down her spine as she realised that she was not alone. What was it?

Panicking, she spun around, hoping to find the path - but it was too late. Red's breathing quickened; her heart hammered against her chest as terror bubbled in her throat. Panic immediately seized her in a spiral of darkness as a sinister shadow grew through the trees. Two malevolent eyes ... the stench of rotten breath ... a spine-chilling howl ...

"Don't stray from the path!" How foolish she had been!

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Activity 2: Initial Response

Now you have read the story, take a moment to reflect on how it made you feel as a reader.

★ In your jotter, write down your initial responses to the story. You may like to reflect on some of the following elements:

- what you enjoyed or disliked
- what surprised, puzzled or intrigued you
- how the story made you feel
- what other stories it may have reminded you of
- what themes lie at the heart of the story
- what morals there are to be learned

★ How does the story compare/contrast to the animation? Make a list of similarities and differences. Which do you feel is more effective and why?

Activity 3: Vocabulary

Let's revisit some of the vocabulary and turns of phrase within the text. Below is a 'never heard the word' grid. Have a look at the words and phrases I have chosen and assess your understanding by ticking and annotating the relevant box. If you know the word, please jot down a definition in your own words.

Word or phrase	Never heard of it	Heard of it but not sure of meaning	Heard of it and here is a definition/explanation of what it means
canopy			
serenity			
pondered			
inquisitively			
anticipation			

primroses			
enticed			
transfixed			
foreboding			
suppressing all life			
vulnerable			
malevolent			

- ★ If there are any words that you do not fully understand, look them up and add them, along with their definitions, into your jotter or magpie book. Challenge yourself to try to use these words in your own story to expand your own vocabulary knowledge.

Activity 3: Establishing the theme

At the heart of any story lies an underlying theme. Sometimes there are many, entwined through complex plots and backstories, but once you get to the heart of the story, there is always an over-arching theme.

In *Red*, the theme being explored is the human characteristic naivety. To be described as naïve means you demonstrate a lack of experience or understanding. Furthermore, naivety has developed into an almost derogatory term, inferring that you are incompetent and inadequate. A naïve person will often act on impulse, going with their gut feeling, rather than calculating the most sensible option.

- ★ Consider the theme of naivety. How many other stories that you know or have read explore this character trait? What can we learn from these characters? Why do you think authors choose to explore this in stories designed for young children?

- ★ Now consider a few books that you love. What are the underlying themes of each story? For example, the underlying themes in *Romeo and Juliet* are hatred and love. The underlying theme in *Beowulf* is heroism.
- ★ As a reader, is there a theme that you enjoy reading about? Consider how this may influence you as a writer. Share your thoughts with someone and discuss how your interests differ or are similar.

Activity 4: Comprehension

We are now going to revisit the story and try to dig a little deeper in terms of our understanding. Below are four reading strategies that I would like you to explore. For each, you will need to go back and find evidence in the text that supports your opinion. Try to form a calculated, cohesive response. For some questions, it may help if you follow this simple pattern:

1. Answer the question with a statement.
2. Back up your statement with evidence found in the text.
3. Explain how the evidence supports your statement.

Strategy 1: Summarising

- In no more than 30 words, write a summary of the story *Red*. Think about the key events that are instrumental in the story.

Strategy 2: Questioning

- Re-read the story and make a list of questions you have as a reader. You may like to question the character's actions as well as the author's intent.

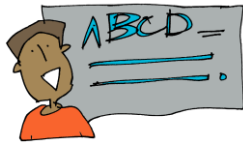
Strategy 3: Clarifying meaning

- What is your impression of Red at the beginning of the story? What led you to this opinion? How does your impression of Red change as the story unfolds?

Strategy 4: Predicting

- The story ends on a cliff-hanger. What do you think will happen next and what led you to this prediction? Have a go at writing the next paragraph of the story.

Activity 5: Exploring grammar in context



Great writing is all designed around having an effect on the reader. *Red* is a tale of fear, written to lull the reader initially into a false sense of security. As an author, we can choose language to affect the reader, as well as manipulating our sentence structure in order to build tension and suspense.

Let's explore some of these elements in more detail.

Step 1 – Identify powerful, emotive verbs

An author's choice of verb is essential when developing a character and establishing the mood. We sometimes call this 'show not tell', where the intention is to reveal something about the main character's personality, or how they are feeling, through their actions.

In *Red*, the main character journeys through an array of contrasting emotions. She begins by feeling happy, then becomes curious, resentful, excited and, finally, scared. However, at no point are we told this; instead, these emotions are alluded to through the way she acts, moves or reacts.

For example, instead of telling us that she is happy at the start of the story, we form this opinion through our association with the verb 'skipping'.

- ★ Take each of the emotions in turn (*happy, curious, resentful, excited, scared*) and look for the verbs in the text that portray or hint at these emotions. Jot them down in a list.
- ★ Next, generate a list of other verbs that you could use for each emotion and add them to your list. For example, to show a character is feeling happy I could include smile, hum, sing, beam, etc.

Step 2 – Understand the impact of figurative techniques

A really effective tool explored in this story is the use of figurative language, particularly metaphor and personification, to build atmosphere. Metaphor helps build an understanding of the story through comparative imagery, whilst personification takes non-human objects and portrays them in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings.

Below is a list of extracts from the text. For each, jot down what the figurative technique(s) is/are and how it makes you feel as the reader. I have done the first one for you as a model.

Extract from <i>Red</i>	Figurative Techniques	How it makes you feel
tall, majestic trees, forming a canopy of serenity.	metaphor	This makes me feel calm and safe. The trees are being depicted as creating a protective shelter above, shielding me from harm.
gently nodding daffodils that flanked the path		
In the distance, a lake of dancing primroses enticed her further in		
(the trees) now formed foreboding tunnels, suppressing all life in their thorny grasp.		
The forest floor, once a blazing carpet of confetti, was now a complex maze of brambles and thorns, tearing at Red's vulnerable ankles.		
Panic immediately seized Red in a spiral of darkness		

Step 3 – Connect for cohesion

Writing at greater depth involves taking the reader on a journey. All of the grammatical elements need to have purpose in order to produce a cohesive, coherent narrative.

Having looked at the use of verbs and figurative techniques, I now want you to investigate how these are combined to enhance the meaning for the reader. The skill is in mirroring the feelings of the character through their own actions as well as the movement of the setting around them. You could plan this as follows:

- How is the character feeling?
- What actions would show this without telling the reader?
- How could this be mirrored in the setting?

For example, at the start of *Red*, my planning would look like this:

- How is the character feeling?
Happy and content
- What actions would show this without telling the reader?
She is skipping through the forest, collecting flowers and taking in the smells of the forest.
- How could this be mirrored in the setting?
The path could gently meander through a calm and tranquil forest. The flowers could smile or nod or wave.

★ Go back through the model and make the links. Ask yourself:

- How is the character feeling?
- What actions would show this without telling the reader?
- How could this be mirrored in the setting?

★ Now jot down some ideas of your own. List three or four feelings you would like to explore with your own character. Then make a list of the actions that would show this emotion and the connections that may be developed through the setting.

Activity 6: Short-burst Writing

Let's now have a go at putting the grammar we have explored into practice. In *Red*, one of the key tools that builds fear is the rapid change in setting and atmosphere. The idea of the setting changing around a character almost intensifies the element of fear as it out of their hands – they are vulnerable and helpless.

Think about an everyday setting that you know well, such as a school or a park. Consider what would turn this everyday setting into something that would be quite scary. Often, we choose to put a character on their own, in the dark, as these are naturally scary things. Being in a school on your own in the middle of the night would definitely be quite creepy.

Once you have chosen your setting, ask yourself the questions:

- How is the character feeling?
- What actions would show this without telling the reader?
- How could this be mirrored in the setting?
- As the setting changes, how will their emotions change and how will you show this?

★ **Now have a go at writing your own piece of short-burst writing, changing the atmosphere and exploring how the main character reacts. I have included a worked example as a guide should you need it.**

Example:

Jez curled his toes into the sand beneath his feet and let out a contented sigh. He gazed across endless waves that stroked the shore, a warm smile spreading across his face. This was paradise. Pulling the sombrero down over his face, he drifted off to sleep.

Jez awoke to the sound of panic all around him. Jumping up, he looked out across the beach – people were tearing around in all directions, gathering up their young and dragging them away from the sea. But where was the sea? The waves that had once stroked the shore had now disappeared. There before him lay an eternity of sand, as far as the eye could see. Jez tried to swallow but his throat was bone dry. Then he saw it.

Activity 7: Identifying the Toolkit



A tale of fear has to evoke an intense emotion in the reader. It has to have the reader on the edge of their seat, desperate to find out what is going to happen next.

To do this, we need to be able to analyse the tools that authors use to create this desired effect. Once we have identified these tools, we can then use them in our own writing.

We have looked at the way that the author mirrors the emotions of the character through the setting. I now want to think about how they intensify the situation through the use of suspense, action and description in the final paragraphs.

Let's re-read the end of the story:

All of a sudden, Red felt like something or someone was watching her; she sensed its presence. An uncontrollable shiver ran down her spine as she realised that she was not alone. What was it?

Panicking, she spun around, hoping to find the path - but it was too late. Red's breathing quickened; her heart hammered against her chest as terror bubbled in her throat. Panic immediately seized her in a spiral of darkness as a sinister shadow grew through the trees. Two malevolent eyes ... the stench of rotten breath ... a spine-chilling howl ...

"Don't stray from the path!" How foolish she had been!

★ **Analysing the text almost line-by-line, let's see how many tools we can identify that help intensify the feeling for the reader. I have done the first paragraph for you below – can you identify the tools in the second paragraph?**

Tool in action in context	Tool identified
All of a sudden,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a dramatic sentence signpost (fronted adverbial) to inject pace.
Red felt like <u>something</u> or <u>someone</u> was watching her; she sensed <u>its</u> presence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hide the threat (<u>use empty, ambiguous words like something, someone, its</u>). Make your main character feel like they are being watched.
An uncontrollable shiver ran down her spine as she realised that she was not alone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a character's reaction to show their inner feelings. Suggest something is about to happen.
What was it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a rhetorical question to make the reader feel worried.
Panicking, she spun around, hoping to find the path	
- but it was too late.	
Red's breathing quickened; her heart hammered against her chest as terror bubbled in her throat.	
Panic immediately seized her in a spiral of darkness as a sinister shadow grew through the trees.	
Two malevolent eyes ... the stench of rotten breath ... a spine-chilling howl ...	
"Don't stray from the path!" How foolish she had been!	

- ★ Go back through the story and highlight any other tools you can find that add to the intensity of the story. You may like to jot some of these down in your magpie book so that you can use them in your own writing.
- ★ Raid other stories and novels and add examples to your magpie book. Remember, great writers take inspiration from their reading.

Activity 8: Short-burst Writing

Before you have a go at writing your own tale of fear, it is important to practise some of the tools.

- ★ From the toolkit we generated, as well as the tools you have magpied from other novels, choose 4 or 5 to explore through short-burst writing. Use the stimulus below to create a paragraph or two that evokes fear in the reader. I have included my own example below for reference.



Example:

Kate held her breath. She knew it was listening. Fear clawed at her stomach, ripping her apart from within - but she had to stay silent. Sinister shadows crept across the stone-cold walls. It was getting closer; she was trapped. Suddenly, the lights turned off, plunging her into darkness.

Activity 9: Boxing up and planning

Red combines the patterns found in a tale of fear with those associated with a warning story. When we look at the underlying pattern, it looks like this:

- | |
|--|
| • Main character (MC) warned not to do something or go somewhere |
| • MC enters familiar setting and ignores warning |
| • MC explores the pleasant setting |
| • The atmosphere of the setting changes and MC is isolated |
| • A threat is introduced and MC reacts |

Once you have identified the pattern of the story, the possibilities are endless. Let your imagination run free. Brainstorm lots of ideas and then decide which captures your interest as a writer.

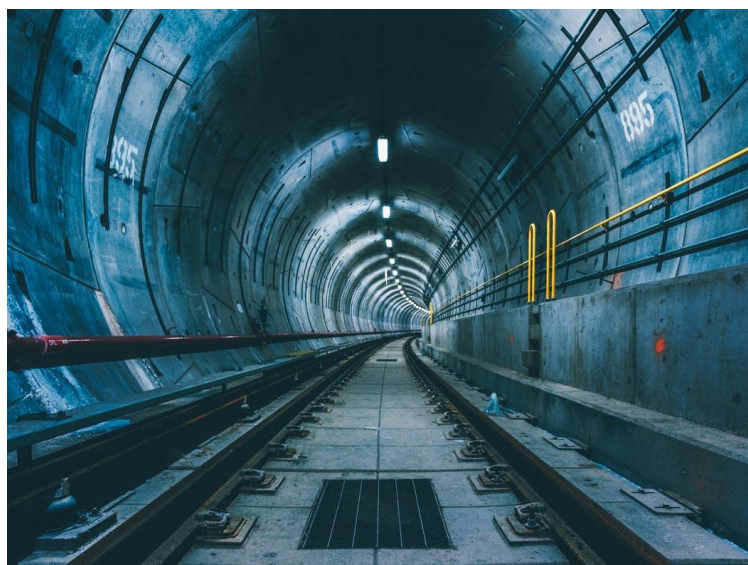
Top tips for story writing:

- **Start in a setting that you know well** – it is far easier to describe something familiar to you, e.g. a garden, your school, your local town, etc.
- **Use a stimulus (e.g. picture)** – an image will help you focus in on the detail and describe what is there.
- **Let your ideas flow** – don't worry about spelling, handwriting or presentation ... you can go back and edit this later.

When you are planning your own story, you may like to replicate the idea of taking a traditional tale and turning it into a tale of fear for an older audience. To help you with this as an idea, I have boxed up a couple of stories below to open your mind to the world of possibility:

Underlying Pattern	Story idea 1 (futuristic)	Story idea 2 (traditional tale)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main character (MC) warned not to do something or go somewhere 	Alec travelling on empty tube train which suddenly stops in tunnel. Told to stay on board by robotic voice.	Hansel and Gretel warned to stay out of the forest.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MC enters familiar setting and ignores warning 	Hours pass. No driver evident. Alec decides to free himself. Leaves tube and sets off down tunnel.	The two children set off for a picnic, ignoring their father's warning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MC explores the pleasant setting 	Walks through large mechanical infrastructure. Admires the technology.	They follow a stream and find a glorious lake in the middle of the forest. They decide to swim.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The atmosphere of the setting changes and MC is isolated 	Lights all turn off, leaving Alec in darkness.	Time passes and ,before they know it, it is getting dark.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A threat is introduced and MC reacts 	Alec hears shouts and screams and then the sound of footsteps running in his direction. He runs.	They are not sure of their way home and head for a light in the woods, not realizing that they are being watched by the witch.

Using the underlying pattern above, plan a few stories of your own. You may like to draw upon your wider reading and imagination. I have also included two pictures as food for thought. Where is your tale of fear going to be set?



Activity 10: Writing your own tale of fear

You now have all of the tools required to write your own tale of fear. You may like to have a go at re-writing a childhood classic for an older audience, or you may prefer to tune into a genre that you enjoy writing. Whatever you decide, reflect on all of the skills we have discussed throughout this unit and see if you can entwine them within your writing.

To recap on all the key points we have learned:

- a. **Decide on a human characteristic to explore through your story.** It can help to develop a character if you begin with a characteristic that may be explored throughout the story. In *Red*, the characteristic was naivety. You could explore characteristics such as arrogance, defiance, stupidity, or perhaps ambition.
 - b. **Write cohesively, mirroring the emotions of the character through the setting.** A greater depth writer always thinks about the purpose of what they are writing. By mirroring the action through the setting, you intensify the atmosphere and help the reader to share in the main character's sense of fear.
 - c. **Draw upon the toolkit.** Keep referring to the toolkit we created and try out new ideas. Raid your reading to see how other authors do this and magpie great ideas.
 - d. **Enjoy it.** Writing is all about sharing a passion for words, stories and the world of possibility. If you love the story you are writing – so will your reader.
- ★ **Now write your tale of fear, drawing on all that you have learned. Don't forget to share or publish your work – great writing deserves an audience! I would love to read any of your finished, published work!**

Extension tasks: other writing opportunities

Whilst I have mapped out ten activities that you may like to explore above, there are many other writing opportunities that you may like to engage in. Here are a few ideas:

★ Front cover and blurb

Complete your story by drawing a front cover and writing the blurb. Can you hook the reader in without giving too much away?

★ Sequel to *Red*

Red finishes on a cliff hanger. Continue the story to reveal what happens next.

★ Diary writing

Write *Red*'s diary entries at the start, middle and end of the day. Make sure you think about how she is feeling and how she may capture this in her diary.

★ Graphic novel

Either turn *Red* or your own tale of fear into a graphic novel. Focus on making sure the illustrations represent the mood created through the writing.

★ Newspaper articles

Following on from our last unit of work, write the newspaper article that accompanies *Red*. Refer back to the previous home-schooling booklet for the tools and structure.

★ Information text (non-chronological report)

Write an information text on the theme in your story (e.g. naivety). Research famous people who have demonstrated this characteristic and include them within the report.

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**Jamie Thomas, Deputy Head and Head of Warren Teaching School Alliance,
now works with Talk for Writing to help schools develop the approach.**

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