

Writing Competition lesson plan for 5–7 year olds

Written by Gill Matthews, Primary Literacy Specialist

You will need

- Writing Competition invitation (available on collins.co.uk)
- Writer's Toolbox resource sheets 1–4
- A selection of Big Cat books on the theme of bravery
- Writing Journals

The Launch

Aim: To identify purpose of, and audience for, writing.

Capture the children's interest and imagination by announcing the Big Cat Writing Competition with a touch of drama. For example the invitation is hand delivered by a uniformed 'courier' or in a large wrapped box that is waiting for the children when they arrive in the classroom, or posters suddenly appear around the school.

Encourage discussion about the competition and explore the children's reactions.

Highlight the key points:

- Who they will be writing for
- What the stories will be about
- When the stories have to be entered
- What will happen to the winning entries

Explore the children's understanding of the theme bravery and courage, encouraging them to give some examples of being brave or having courage. Ask whether they have read any stories where characters have been particularly brave. Establish that bravery isn't just about physical strength, it can also be about having mental strength. Ask children to look through the recommended Big Cat books that use the theme

of bravery and discuss the different types of courage that are shown.

(Note that each school taking part in the competition can only enter one story for this age group. This means that there will have to be an in-school competition or some other means of deciding which story will be entered. Certificates are available on the Collins website for this purpose)

You may like to establish Writers' Circles at this point: small groups in which children can develop ideas, share their stories at different points in the writing process and feed back on each other's writing. Children need to feel comfortable in their particular Circle and secure in both giving and receiving comments on their writing. It may be necessary to model the type of questions and responses that you expect in Writers' Circles. Equally, you could give children the prompts on the *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Discussion prompts*. Providing dedicated Writing Journals would also be helpful. The children can use these to record research notes; ideas for stories, characters, settings etc; words and phrases that they hear or read as well as drafts of their stories and their Writer's Toolbox sheets. In essence, the Writing Journals act as a chronological record of the writing journey.

The Audience

Aim: To consider how audience affects content, style and tone of writing.

The children need to think about for whom they are writing their stories, as the audience affects the style, tone and content of writing. Suggest that they write their stories for other children in their class, or for younger children (if appropriate).

The children will need to talk to their intended audience and find out their likes and dislikes when it comes to stories. Give each Writers' Circle the chance to explore books that their audience are reading. They can then choose a couple of the books to read aloud to their audience. *Writer's*

Toolbox Sheet: Book Talk is useful for prompting and recording responses to the books. Remind them to record their research notes in their Writing Journals.

Support each Writers' Circle in thinking about their audience's responses and how this will affect the stories they are going to write.

Allow each Circle to feedback to the rest of the class and build in time for discussion about what features their stories should have. It could be easy for the children to get bogged down in detail at this point so try to keep things simple and emphasise that *enjoyment* is the key word – for both the writers and the readers. Give the children time to record their thoughts in their Writing Journals.

Identifying the Ideas

Aim: To identify story content.

This is the first step in the writing process and one that is a challenge for some children. If the cry 'I don't know what to write about!' is ringing round the classroom, it's time to give the children some hooks to hang their writing on.

Show them something you 'found' at home or on your way into school for example a large, old key; a box containing an old photo; a postcard with a mysterious message.

Encourage the children to use talk to explore the object and to build up stories about it:

- Where has it come from?
- What does the key open?
- Who is in the photo?
- What does that mean?

Discuss how they could use one of the objects in their stories.

Borrow ideas from existing stories – after all people do say there are only seven types of stories in the world! Pie Corbett, in his book *How to Teach Fiction Writing at Key Stage 2*, has turned them into child-friendly versions:

- Defeating the Monster – the main character overcomes an obstacle of some sort, for example a bully, a fear, an illness.
- Rags to Riches – the main character feels ill-treated but overcomes their difficulties and is transformed in some way. Think Cinderella.
- The Quest – the main character is challenged to go on a journey and retrieve something. They set off, overcome some obstacles and return successful.

- Character flaw – the main character has a character flaw of some sort, for example greed, selfishness, spitefulness which gets them into trouble. By the end of the story, they have learned their lesson and changed.
- Finding Tale – the main character finds something which leads them into trouble. The character has to get out of trouble and often ends up losing, or giving away, the object they found.
- Losing Tale – the main character loses something. They then have to search for it. The story ends either with them suffering the consequences of the loss or finding the object again.
- Warning tale – the main character is warned not to do something or go somewhere. However, they ignore the warning, do it anyway and get into trouble. The character is rescued in the end and (hopefully) learns a lesson.

You could identify and explain one or two of these story types to the children and encourage them to choose one that lends itself to the theme of bravery and courage. Defeating the Monster and Rags to Riches would both work well. If you have books available that tell one of the story types, read them aloud to the children.

For children who are struggling to come up with an idea, teach them an oral version of a traditional tale in which a character demonstrates bravery or courage for example Cinderella (she stands up to her stepmother), Little Red Riding Hood (if she were to rescue Granny), The Three Little Pigs (they stand up to the Wolf – eventually). They can then draw a story map that represents the story and retell the story to their Writers' Circle using the map for support.

Planning the Plot

Aim: To organise a story effectively.

Step two in the writing process is planning – a step which helps children to map out their stories and identify any parts that don't work or are weak.

Talk with the children about their knowledge and understanding of the structure of stories. Discuss what happens in each part of the story. To support the discussion, introduce the idea of a Story Mountain (*Writer's Toolbox sheet: Story Mountain*). Essentially this is a profile of the excitement level in a story, and can be broken down into 3 sections:

- The beginning – character(s) and setting are introduced. The challenge/problem is identified
- The middle (exciting bit) – the character(s) face and overcome the challenge/problem
- The ending – the character(s) return to their daily lives but are changed in some way

Given the theme of the children's stories, bravery will be demonstrated in section two. Emphasise that

a story with a flat excitement profile is not going to keep their readers interested.

Each Writer's Circle can take one of the books that they read to their target audience, or indeed another story, and analyse the structure, making brief notes about what happens in each section. These can be recorded on *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Story Mountain* or as a story map. Some children can just use pictures on their story maps, challenge others to include key words.

Those children who learned the oral version of a traditional tale can start to innovate on it by making small changes to their retellings. For example, adding more detail to show the bravery of one of the characters. Encourage them to add these details to their story maps.

Ask the children to share their plans in their Writers' Circles and to use *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Discussion prompts* to help with feedback. Ask them to check that their plans show that one of the characters is brave. Give children time to make changes to their plans if they wish.

Capturing the Characters

Aim: To develop characterisation.

In this step of the writing process, the children start to build their characters and look at writing effective descriptions. These activities give children practice in developing characters using techniques that they can then draw on when writing their own stories.

Find a bag (handbag, rucksack, sports bag) and put a few items in it that give hints about the bag's possible owner, for example a pair of binoculars, kagool, map, notebook, a book about birds, a man's handkerchief. Unpack it in front of the children and ask them to build up an image of the owner, using the contents of the bag as clues, for example the rucksack belongs to a man who is going on a walk to look at birds or wildlife. Develop the character through a Role on the Wall activity (see below). Some children may wish to use this character in their stories.

Role on the Wall (see *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Role on the Wall*) involves recording a character's external features (appearance, how they speak, how they move) outside the outline and their characteristics (personality traits, feelings, thoughts) inside the outline. Encourage the children to use expanded noun phrases for example sparkling blue eyes, curly black hair and challenge them to use more sophisticated vocabulary for example courageous rather than brave, so they can draw on this language as they write their story. Focus particularly on developing the children's

ability to think about a character as a whole – rather than just their physical appearance.

Source images of interesting looking people from the internet, magazines and newspapers. Each Writers' Circle can choose one of the images and use *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Role on the Wall* to build up a character profile of them. Some children may wish to use this character in their stories.

For those children who have learned the oral version of a traditional tale, they can use *Writer's Toolbox sheet: Role on the Wall* to build up a character profile of their main character.

By now, children should have created the main characters in their stories. They could use the *Role on the Wall* technique to develop them further. Check that they have no more than three characters in their stories as, for young writers, a cast of hundreds is difficult to control!

Writers' Circles can use role play and drama to explore and develop their characters. One example activity is Hot Seating. Children can take it in turns to be in the hot seat in role as their main character and the rest of the group can ask questions. This helps children to think about how their characters might speak, think and behave.

Give children time to write brief descriptions of their main characters. These should include some information about the character's personality as well as their appearance. Encourage them to think about how their character shows that they are brave, rather than just saying they are brave.

Sorting the Setting

Aim: To develop setting descriptions.

This step of the writing process involves children creating settings and describing them. The setting of a story is *where* the story happens and *when* it happens. A story might take place in one setting, or the characters might start in one setting, and then move to a different setting. These activities give children practice in developing settings using techniques that they can then draw on when writing their own stories.

Source images of interesting settings. Give copies to each Writers' Circle and give them time to look closely at the images. Use these questions to prompt discussion about one of the images:

- What can you see?
- What time of day do you think it is?

- What time of year do you think it is?
- What is the weather like?
- What might you be able to hear?
- How would you feel if you were in the picture?
- What might be outside the picture?

Challenge the children to use more adventurous vocabulary rather than the first word or phrase they think of. Record their responses on a flipchart or whiteboard. Use Shared Writing to involve the children in using their responses to create a description of the setting. Encourage them to use expanded noun phrases and adverbs to add details.

Children can then start to build up a description of a setting in their stories and share these descriptions in their Writers' Circle. They can use *Writer's Toolbox Sheets: Discussion prompts* to give and receive feedback.

Looking at Language

Aim: To make informed, effective language choices.

By this point in the writing process, the children have planned their stories and created characters and settings. They can now write a first draft and start thinking carefully about the language that they use. These activities give children practice in making informed, effective language choices.

On a flipchart or whiteboard, write up a simple sentence for example The cat sat on the mat. Challenge the children to help you add detail that will help the reader to visualise the scene. Use these prompts to help:

- Give me an adjective that describes the cat
- Give me an adverb that tells us how the cat is sitting
- Let's change the verb 'sat' to something more interesting
- Do we need to change the adverb?
- Give me an adjective to describe the mat
- Let's change the noun 'mat' to something more interesting
- Do we need to change the adjective?

Don't accept the first, and often most obvious, words the children give you – push them to make more adventurous and unusual choices.

Thinking about how a character is feeling can have a huge impact on the choice of words and phrases that young writers choose to use. Ask the children to imagine that a new girl is joining their class. She is stood outside the classroom door and is feeling very nervous. How would she open the door? With a bang or very slowly? How would she come into the room? Skipping or creeping? How would she speak? What would she say? How would she speak?

Now change the character to a girl who is feeling very confident and repeat the activity.

Write up three or four fairly ordinary verbs that you feel the children overuse, for example: said, looked, walked. Challenge the Writers' Circles to produce a list of alternatives for the verbs and to talk about how they are different from the originals, for example: 'shouted' is louder than 'said' but 'whispered' is quieter. Display the lists so that children can refer to them as they write.

Give children time to write their drafts, drawing on their original plan and the activities they've done involving the development of characters and settings and making informed language choices. They can share their drafts in their Writers' Circle and use *Writer's Toolbox Sheet: Discussion prompts* to support feedback. Join in with some of the Writers' Circle sessions and share your responses.

Polishing the Prose

Aim: To improve writing through editing.

This step in the writing process gives children the opportunity to take on board feedback from their Writers' Circle and to improve their draft stories.

Remind the children of their identified audience, the theme of their stories (bravery and courage) and their word limit (300–500 words). Ask them to read through their stories to double check they have addressed these three elements and to make any necessary changes.

Hold meetings with each Writers' Circle and discuss what they are going to focus on as they polish and proof-read their stories. Check that they understand that a successful story has to keep the reader interested and entertained as well as being correctly spelt and punctuated and grammatically accurate. Offer 1:1 sessions with children who feel that they need support or guidance with the polishing process. Give the children time to make any changes and improvements that they feel are necessary.

Explain that they are going to spend time carefully proofreading their stories and that this is challenging,

as we tend to see what we meant to write rather than what we actually wrote.

- Give children time to read their stories aloud to themselves to check that they make sense and that they haven't missed out any words.
- Ask them to look at the words they have chosen to use. Could they make more adventurous choices?
- Challenge the children to check their spellings. Do any of the words look wrong?
- Finally, is each sentence punctuated correctly, starting with a capital letter and ending with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark?
- They could also ask someone else in their Writers' Circle to read their story to double check for any mistakes.

Allow time for the proofreading process and for the children to make any necessary changes.

Discuss with the children whether the finished versions of their stories are going to be handwritten or typed up. Allow time for the children to create their final versions. Be aware that a typed up version of the final entries also needs to be supplied.

Reading the Result

Aim: To read with fluency and expression.

The final step in the writing process is to present the stories to the intended audience.

Discuss with the children how they want to go about this. If they've written for younger children, they could visit the classrooms and hold a read-aloud session. If they've written for children of their own age, they could hold a Story Slam where each Writing Circle reads their story to a small group of children. If reading

aloud is going to take place, give children the chance to rehearse within their Writers' Circle until they feel confident. Some children might prefer to give their stories to their audience for them to read themselves.

Depending on how you have decided to choose which story will be entered for the competition, you could organise an anonymous voting system for the stories.

And now – crunch time! Check the rules of the competition and make sure that you submit the story by the deadline.

Gill Matthews is the series editor of the *Collins Big Cat Guided Reading Handbooks*.
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