



Tell me a story



Anna Ephgrave explains story scribing, an effective way to engage nursery- and Reception-age children in the writing process...

Writing is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. This vital point is being ignored in many schools where children are being forced to learn at ever younger ages, purely for the sake of passing a test. No wonder they don't opt to write when given a choice of what to do. Children at Carterhatch Infant School, on the other hand, write for various reasons: to remember what to buy at the shop or put in the cake; to create a wonderful story that will be read to the class or send messages to their friends; to ask the site staff to do a job or the headteacher for a new resource; the list goes on and on. In fact, there are always children writing in our nursery and Reception classes.

Resources to support 'writing' are in all areas, including clipboards, which allow the children to take paper and pens to any areas they wish. We don't have 'writing areas' because young children do not see writing as something separate to their normal activity - it is just another part of their play. However, the resources are always to hand, clearly labelled, well stocked and offered alongside a wide variety of mark-making implements, paper, notebooks and card.

Story scribing

Writing, writing, writing - every setting is worried about progress in writing. However, in the early years at Carterhatch, we have demonstrated that children can make

outstanding progress in their writing without us ever telling them to write. I repeat: we never tell the children to write; we wait for the moment when they're interested and then we pounce! When a child is motivated to do something, that is the moment when support and teaching will be most powerful.

We use 'story scribing', an approach I first heard about from Vivien Gussin Paley. Whenever the staff feel it is appropriate, they will offer to scribe a story for a child. Quite often it is just a drawing that will be the initial stimulus for a story - a butterfly, a princess, a monster or a robot that sparks the imagination. As the child speaks and the adult writes, it is important for the former to watch, and for the adult to write exactly what the child says (even if it is grammatically incorrect). In this way, even the youngest children learn that their spoken words can be transferred onto paper. They also see how writing is formed and what it looks like.

New staff have the following prompt sheet to help them support the children appropriately during the story scribing process:

- **Sit beside the child (if you are right-handed, put the child on your left).**
- **Make sure the child watches you write (the paper should be in front of the child, if possible).** Write exactly what the child says.
- **Use your knowledge of each child to decide which teaching is appropriate.**
- **Say the words as you write them.**
- **Sometimes stop and read what you have written, then let the child carry on.**
- **Sound out some words as you write them.**
- **Point out spaces, capitals and full stops, etc.**

- Exaggerate some letter formation.
- Ask the child to sound out some words for you.
- Ask the child to write a few letters - or words - as appropriate to the individual child.
- Use terms such as 'characters', 'author', etc.
- The story is the important part, so keep the momentum; the teaching should not slow down the scribing too much.

For some children, it will be appropriate to suggest that they add their name at the end of the story. Over the course of a year, there might be a few children in the nursery who are able and keen to write a few other letters or words within their story. Later, in Reception, the adults will offer the child the pen so that they can write a few of the sounds, words and eventually phrases that they are capable of. Thus it becomes a shared writing process.

At the end of a session (morning or afternoon), any scribed stories are shown to the group and an adult selects some children to act as the characters in the story. Then the story is read aloud and the children 'act' the story. When this activity is first introduced, and the children see a story being acted out, many more of them will be keen to write a story the next day.

Recording stories

The stories are kept in the children's folders and become a record of their language development, their story-writing development, their imagination, sometimes their understanding of the world (depending on the content of the story), their pencil control (if there is a picture or if they have added their name) and, in Reception, a record of their phonics and writing development.

The following stories, and many others, appear in one nursery child's folder (all the writing in these stories was done by an adult):

November: "I am butterfly. I fly. I go home." The end.

January: "I am a butterfly and I always fly. I fly to little Africa and you have to play there. And then we finished. We go back to our home." The end.

March: "One day there was a little, little butterfly. He fly to little toy's house. Then he hop in the car and drive away to Africa. When he is finished in Africa he fly back home. Then there were two little fairies. They find a flying pony and fly all the way to the moon. Then when it's finished they fly back home." The end.

May: "One night a flying boat with magic slept and woke up, had lunch. He went in the forest. Then he fly into the down, down, down, down and goes deeped where the forest is. He found the very mean dragon and killed it, he

was evil. He used the magical thing to kill it. And he fly back home and had the milk." The end.

July: "There was a big, big tiger. He was friendly and there was a friendly bat and a friendly bear. They found some friends to play with. They flied through the forest and to the moon. They lived there. Then they found a rainbow and flied to the end of it and found a treasure and went back home." The end.

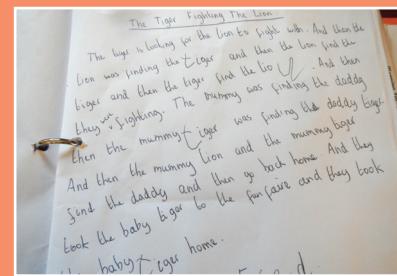
In the Reception folders, the progress is dramatic too. The series of photos pictured here shows a few of the stories from Joey's folder. In the first, a few sounds have been written by the child, in the next a few words, and in the next a few phrases. By the end of the year, Joey was writing the complete stories himself. This evidence is replicated in many Reception folders and it was one of the main things that impressed our Ofsted inspectors.

Our Reception children have 10- or 15-minute phonic sessions each day - short, intense teaching sessions - giving them the phonic knowledge that they can then apply as they choose. Remember, if you are going to try story scribing, the acting out of the stories is the most important thing for the children; it is this part of the process that will engage and inspire other children to want to write.

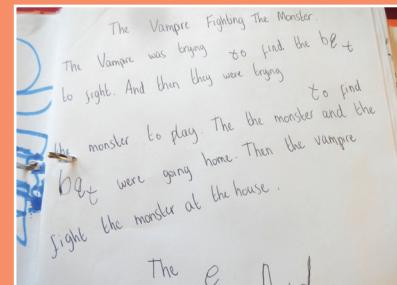
With the top-down pressure in schools, it's easy to become anxious and try to 'force' writing, but experience has shown that the wait is worthwhile. Story scribing is a fantastic way to motivate children to want to write. It is also a great way to teach them about the process of writing well before they may be physically able to do any writing themselves. Starting formal teaching of writing at an earlier age does not lead to higher academic attainment at a later age. Indeed, putting pressure on young children before they are developmentally ready and before they are interested can have the opposite effect, putting them off literacy activities for life. We aim to do the reverse - the children become so fascinated and excited about what can be achieved by writing that they are nagging us to have a go!

find out more

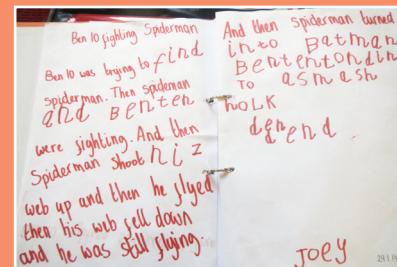
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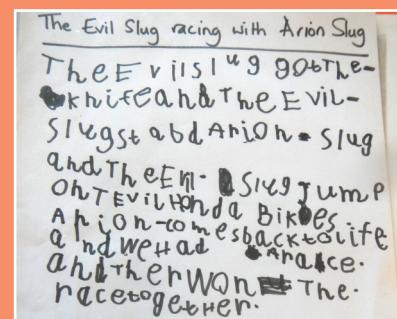
STORY 1: NOVEMBER



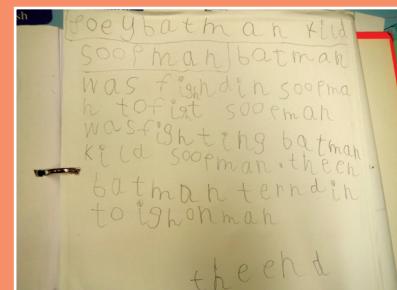
STORY 2: DECEMBER



STORY 3: JANUARY



STORY 4: MARCH



STORY 5: JUNE

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