



TalkforWriting™

Talk for Writing Home-school booklet

# Warning Stories

by James Walker



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## How to use this booklet

This booklet is to support teachers in delivering an engaging unit of English work either in school or remotely. We advise that, for the majority of the activities, you guide the children with a short input to explain the task and set expectations. Some of the activities may need adapting to meet the needs of your children.

### Activity 1: Warm-up game: What-am-I? riddles



- 1) I am not alive but I grow. I don't have lungs but I need air. Water kills me. What am I?
- 2) I make two people out of one. What am I?
- 3) I am white when I am dirty and black when I am clean. What am I?
- 4) This is light as a feather yet no one can hold it for long. What is it?
- 5) The more you take away the bigger I become. What am I?
- 6) I have hands but I cannot scratch myself. What am I?
- 7) I can be cracked. I can be made. I can be told. I can be played. What am I?
- 8) I am tall when I am new and short when I am old. What am I?
- 9) I have a little house in which I live all alone. It has no doors or windows and if I want to go out I must break through the wall. What am I?
- 10) I am strong enough to sink ships but I fear the sun. What am I?



Brain fried? Don't worry - the answers are at the end of this booklet.

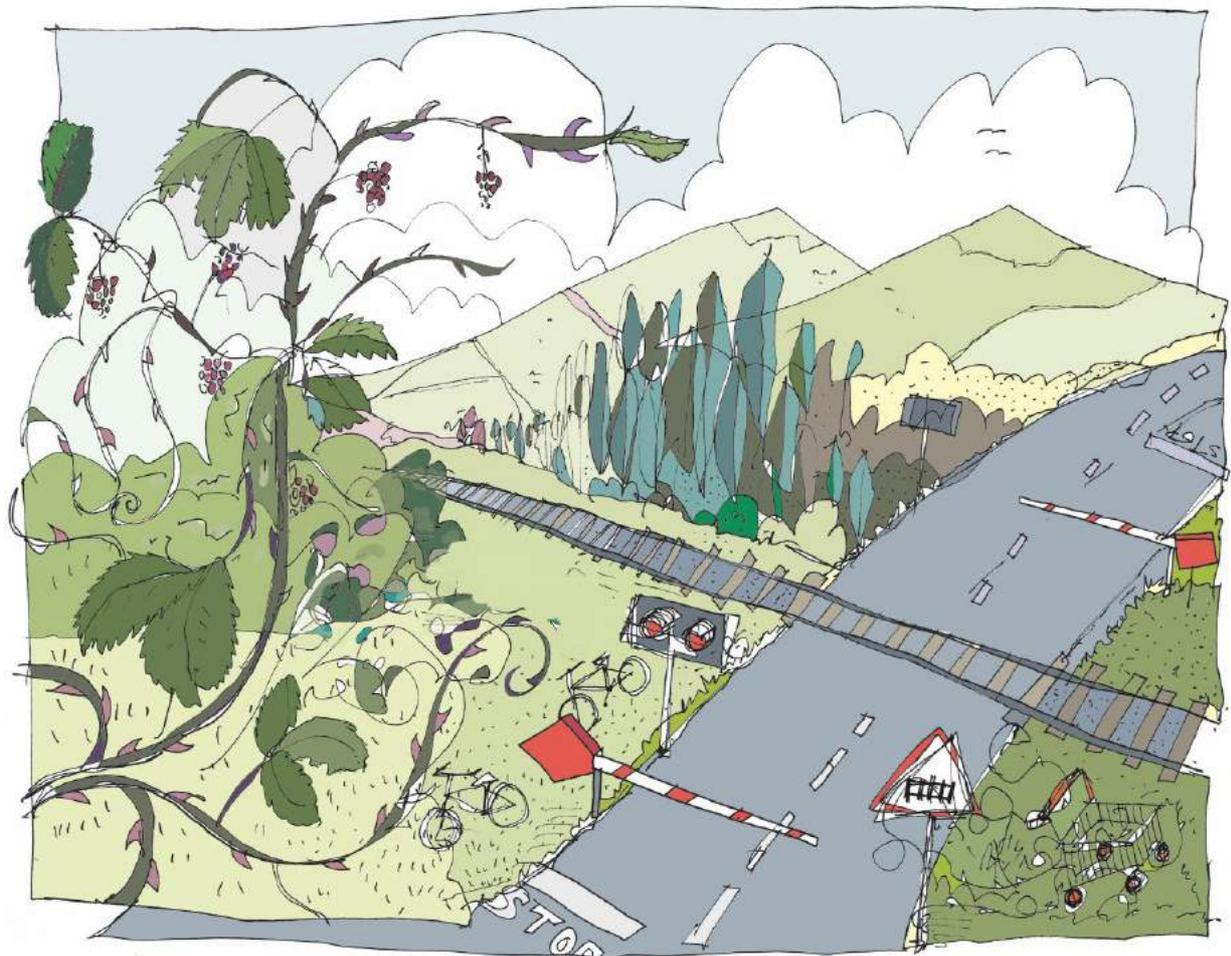
## Introduction - Warning stories

As children grow up, they naturally want to go and explore their local area, especially places that are full of adventure and even a hint of danger. Grown-ups try to keep everyone safe by warning them in person, putting up signs, having announcements on the radio or even adverts on the TV. I wonder if, already, you can think of a warning that you have been given. It is definitely human nature that when you are warned something is a bit dangerous, it becomes more exciting! But it's very important that serious warnings are taken very seriously because some so-called games are life threatening. This story helps to underline the fact that some 'games' must not be played.

In the words of Allan Spence, who is Head of public and passenger safety, Network Rail: "It may seem harmless to take a shortcut, or fun to play on the tracks, but this is not just illegal, it is also very dangerous. Taking a short cut or messing around on the tracks can kill or maim you. Parents, peers and family can help press home our simple message: keep off the track."

As you will see, I've used his warning to name our story: *Keep off the tracks!* This model text provides a real warning as well as focusing on how to describe a setting to help the reader picture the scene. Read it below and have a listen here:

<https://soundcloud.com/talkforwriting/keep-off-the-tracks/s-7QnBMQuW0lb>



## Keep off the tracks!

"Don't go playing near that railway track!" Jake's dad warned, "You know it's dangerous. That's why it's illegal!"

Jake and Nazeem nodded in agreement but then grinned secretly at each other as they turned to go. Whilst they raced through the park on their bikes, Nazeem shot off shouting, "Last one to the tracks buys the ice creams!"

Jake set off in pursuit, puffing and panting. They both zipped under the barrier onto the railway track just before it came down. Nazeem punched the air triumphantly like Usain Bolt. Victory! Up ahead, brambles choked the stony tracks, an old shopping trolley lay discarded and empty crisp packets were pinned to the thorny hedge. The tracks gleamed, reflecting the harsh, midday sun.

There was nobody to be seen so Jake dropped his bike and went to explore, ignoring the bright red warning signs. Without a care in the world, he balanced like a tightrope-walker along the cold, rusty rail. He felt vibrations shudder through his body. The train was coming! At that moment, his foot slipped and jammed in the sleepers\*. "Ow!" he howled, desperately tugging at his foot. It was stuck fast. There was no escape.

Nazeem span around and, with his heart pounding, ran to rescue his friend. He pulled with all his might but to no avail. The colour drained from Nazeem's face; this was serious! Panicking, he scrambled down the track and screamed for help. As he heard the train rumbling closer, he spotted Jake's dad screeching to a halt in his red car. Desperately, Nazeem blurted out the problem. "Where is he?" Mr Newton shouted frantically. With fear in his eyes, he ran as fast as he could to his son's rescue.

With all his might, he tugged on Jake's leg, dislodging his trainer. Jake was free! A second later, an Intercity 125 sped past in a blur with its horn blaring. After their narrow escape, Jake's dad ranted at the shaken boys. They bowed their heads in shame.

That day, they learned a valuable lesson: playing on railway lines is insane. And, of course, there were no ice creams ...

(\*A sleeper is the name of the strong planks of timber that support railway lines.)

## Activity 2 - Storytelling and mapping

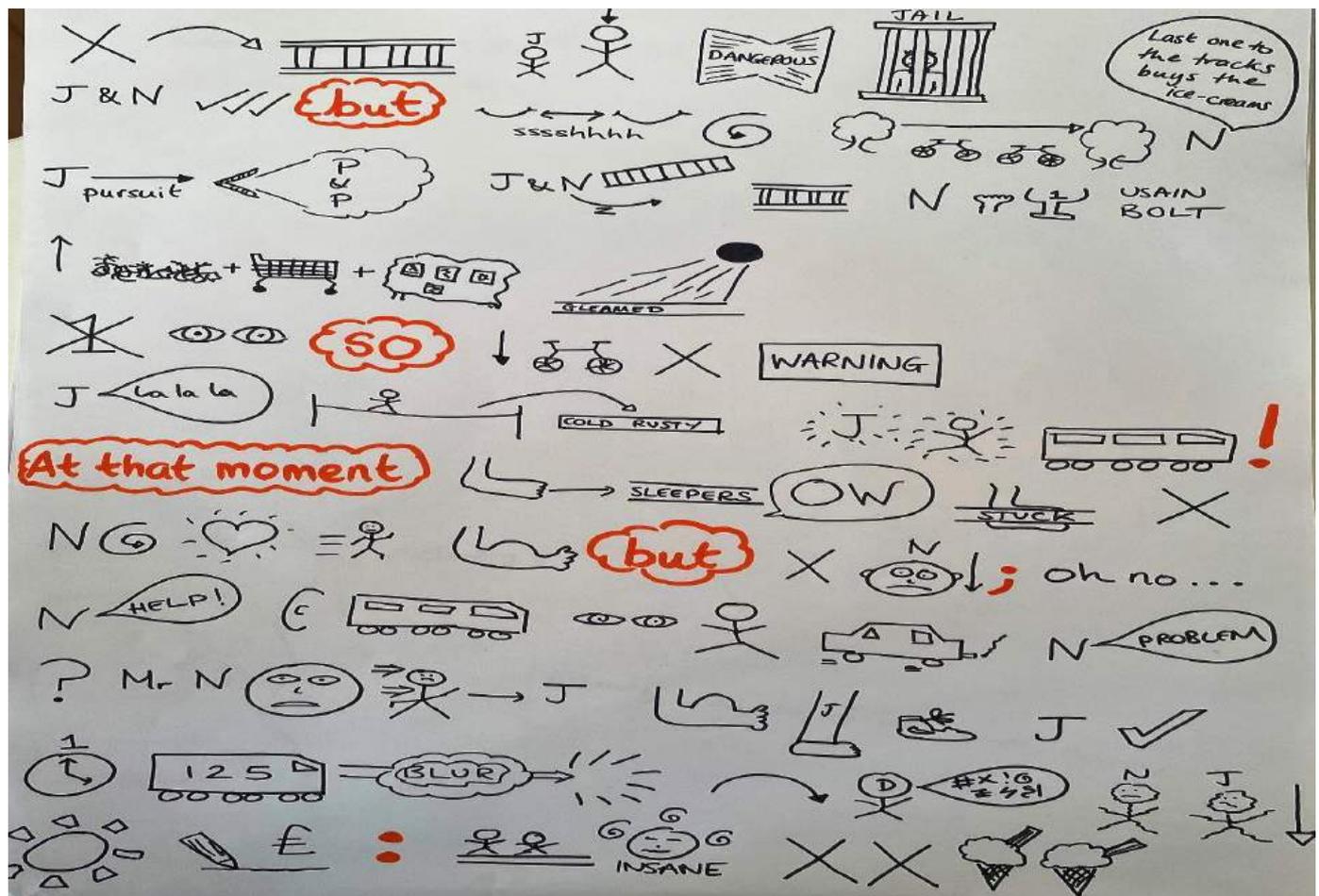
If you are aware of the storytelling part of Talk for Writing, then you could have a go at learning and retelling the model text – and even if you’ve never heard of this before, have a go – it’s not difficult, it’s entertaining and it’s very useful. Usually, the better you know the model, the better your writing will end up as you will have learned some new language and sentence patterns and will have a good sense of the underlying story structure which you can hug to or adapt as you choose.

### Key elements for learning a story:

- Draw a text map
- Identify actions for some of the key language
- Practise a few sentences at a time
- Change your voice to match the emotions of the story
- Speed up or slow down to match the action

Given that you have a recording of this story, try drawing your own version of the map below and then use your map to help tell the story with me so that, very quickly, you won’t need me reading the story and you can tell it on your own.

#### A simple text map for *Keep off the tracks!*



### Activity 3: Underlying pattern of warning stories

Below, I have picked out the underlying pattern of the model text. This gives you the pattern for your own writing but remember you can change, adapt, add in more sections and change the ending if you like. It is just a helpful guide.

Underlying pattern of a warning story	Keep off the Tracks!
<p><b>Opening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MC warned</li> <li>• Hint they will ignore it</li> </ul>	<p>“Don’t go playing near that railway track!” Jake’s dad warned, “You know it’s dangerous. That’s why it’s illegal!”</p> <p>Jake and Nazeem nodded in agreement but then grinned secretly at each other as they turned to go. Whilst they raced through the park on their bikes, Nazeem shot off shouting, “Last one to the tracks buys the ice creams!”</p>
<p><b>Build-up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MC arrive at the setting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting described</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Jake set off in pursuit, puffing and panting. They both zipped under the barrier onto the railway track just before it came down. Nazeem punched the air triumphantly like Usain Bolt. Victory! Up ahead, brambles choked the stony tracks, an old shopping trolley lay discarded and empty crisp packets were pinned to the thorny hedge. The tracks gleamed, reflecting the harsh midday sun.</p>
<p><b>Dilemma</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MC gets into serious danger!</li> </ul>	<p>There was nobody to be seen so Jake dropped his bike and went to explore, ignoring the bright-red warning signs. Without a care in the world, he balanced like a tightrope-walker along the cold, rusty rail. He felt vibrations shudder through his body. The train was coming! At that moment, his foot slipped and jammed in the sleepers. “Ow!” he howled, desperately tugging at his foot. It was stuck fast. There was no escape.</p>
<p><b>Resolution</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solution: rescue</li> </ul>	<p>Nazeem span around and with his heart pounding, ran to rescue his friend. He pulled with all his might but to no avail. The colour drained from Nazeem’s face; this was serious! Panicking, he scrambled down the track and screamed for help. As he heard the train rumbling closer, he spotted Jake’s dad screeching to a halt in his red car. Desperately, Nazeem blurted out the problem. “Where is he?” Mr Newton shouted frantically. With fear in his eyes, he ran as fast as he could to his son’s rescue.</p>
<p><b>Ending</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MC safe</li> <li>• Told off/scolded</li> <li>• MC learn a lesson</li> </ul>	<p>With all his might, he tugged on Jake’s leg, dislodging his trainer. Jake was free! A second later, an Intercity 125 sped past on the next line in a blur with its horn blaring. After their narrow escape, Jake’s dad ranted at the shaken boys. They bowed their heads in shame. That day, they learned a valuable lesson: playing on railway lines is insane. And, of course, there were no ice creams ...</p>

## Activity 4: Match the vocabulary to its definition

You might not know all of the vocabulary that is in our model text. Don't worry as this activity will help! Match the word to the correct definition and then check at the end of the booklet that you have them all right.

Word	Definition
blur	<i>to tremble from fear or cold</i>
frantically	<i>an instance of quivers or tremors</i>
triumphantly	<i>to cast aside or get rid of</i>
shudder	<i>to become stuck or wedged</i>
vibrations	<i>having achieved victory or success</i>
discarded	<i>in a desperate, wild or frenzied state</i>
ranted	<i>against the law and therefore forbidden</i>
bowed	<i>to make an outline indistinct, hazy or smudged</i>
blaring	<i>to speak in a wild or violent way</i>
jammed	<i>to emit a loud, raucous noise</i>
illegal	<i>to lower your head or bend forward</i>

- ★ You could magpie some of these words and use them in your own writing later on.
- ★ You could think of (or look up) synonyms for these words
- ★ You could write sentences with these words in so you show you can use them

## Activity 5: Sentence imitation

Practising some of the sentence types and patterns we will need in our writing is a good idea. We can innovate on the same underpinning sentence patterns again and again in a range of ways which strengthens our writing repertoire.

### Sentence from our model:

The colour drained from his Nazeem's face; this was serious!

**Tip:** You can see here that the semicolon joins two separate sentences (main clauses) that are closely related to each other together. The semicolon replaces conjunctions (joining words) like *and*, *because* and *but*.

### Here are 3 more examples:

I ran out into the street; it was pouring with rain.

Everyone ran away from the fire; it was burning ferociously.

The storm raged above; we hid in the bomb shelter.

**Tip:** use a pronoun after the semicolon to start the second clause, for example, *it*, *he*, *we*, *she*, *them*, *I*, *this*.

### ★ Now it's your turn!

Write five 2-clause sentences below that follow the same pattern as above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## Activity 6: Reading as a reader

The grid below gathers your initial responses to the text as a reader. I have done an example in each box as a guide. You may want to change the titles to things like: *Predictions, What you know about the characters, Inferences* etc.

Likes	Dislikes
<i>I like it when they are racing to the train tracks on their bikes.</i>	<i>I don't like them ignoring such a serious warning. They seem like they are stupid.</i>
Questions	I think ...
<i>What will their punishment be? Will they learn their lesson?</i>	<i>I think that the boys are always up to no good and have done things like this before.</i>

## Activity 7: The writer's toolkit: Setting description

The focus for our writing is on describing the setting. Have a look at the toolkit below to see some of the tools we can use.

### TO DESCRIBE SETTING WE CAN...

- ★ Bring the setting/weather to life – give human characteristics to the setting by choosing verbs that are associated with human beings. The technical name for this is personification:

e.g. *brambles choked the stony track*  
*Mist smothered the view.*



- ★ Pick out unusual details to bring the setting alive:

e.g. *empty crisp packets were pinned to the thorny hedge*  
*harsh midday sun*

- ★ Compare something to something else – use similes

e.g. *Nazeem punched the air triumphantly like Usain Bolt.*  
*... balanced like a tightrope-walker*

- ★ Show the setting or the action through the eyes of the character – what can they see/what do they do?

e.g. *There was nobody to be seen so Jake dropped his bike and went to explore, ignoring the bright red warning signs.*  
*Zak could see a speck of light in the distance.*

- ★ Use the pathetic fallacy – This is the name used when a writer or artist uses the weather to reflect the mood. So, if the character is in danger, then the weather would be threatening.

e.g. *The tracks gleamed, reflecting the harsh midday sun.*  
*The sullen clouds circled overhead.*

- ★ Use a detailed sentence of 3 to describe what can be seen, heard or touched

e.g. *Up ahead, brambles choked the stony tracks, an old shopping trolley lay discarded and empty crisp packets were pinned to the thorny hedge.*

## Activity 8: Can you spot good setting description?

Look at the four sentences below describing settings. Each of them has some good qualities. Deciding which sentence works best will depend on context – what has come before and what is coming next.

1. The tree had gnarled bark and finger-like branches.
2. It looked as if the branches were clawing the sky.
3. In the middle of the park, an old, ancient tree stood silently.
4. Rusted clouds turned the sky an ominous, deep orange.

★ **In the boxes below, comment on the effectiveness of each of these sentences below – saying what you like or don't like and giving reasons for your views.** Remember to look back at the toolkit to see what tools help when describing settings.

1. The tree had gnarled bark and finger-like branches.

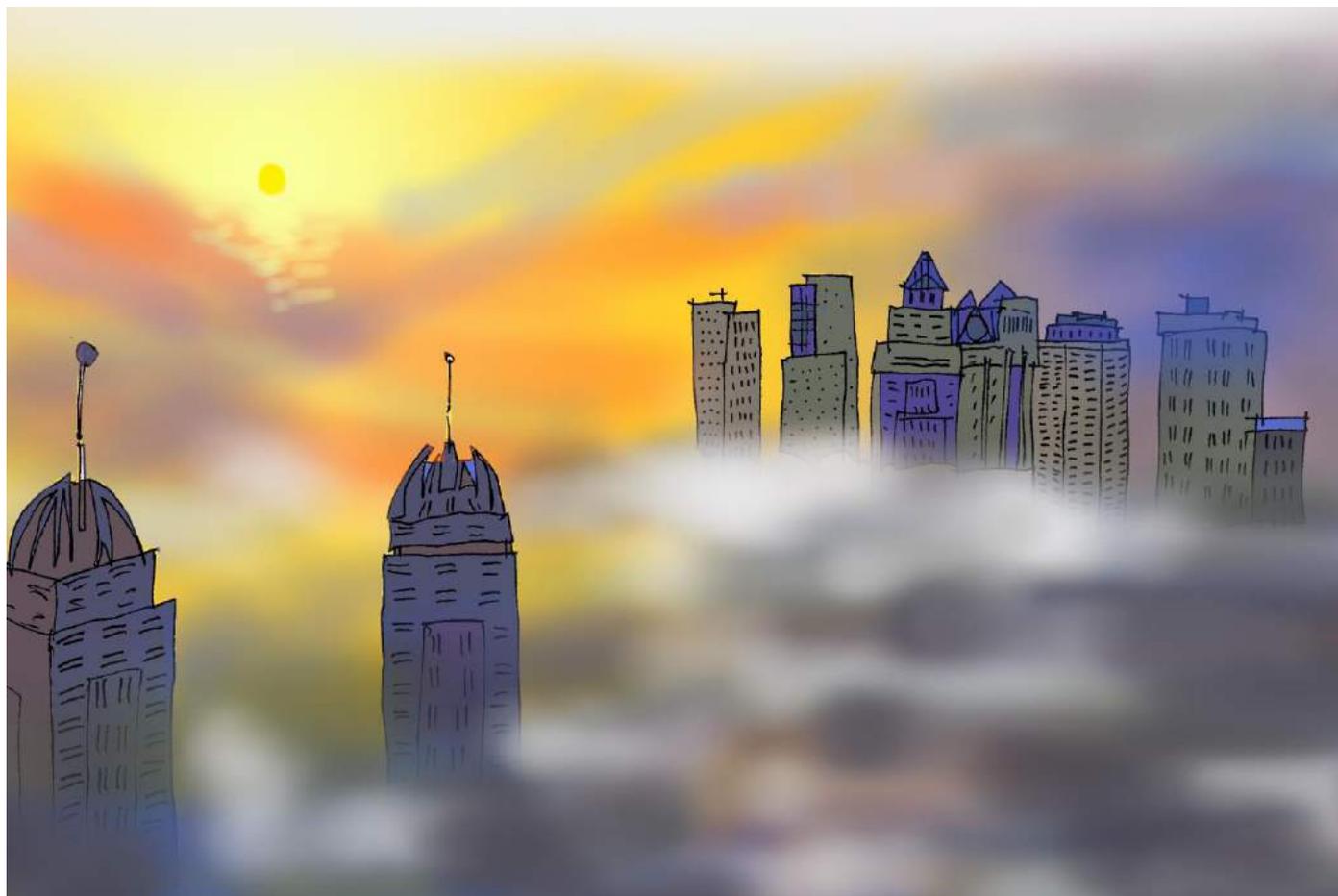
2. It looked as if the branches were clawing the sky.

3. In the middle of the park, an old, ancient tree stood silently.

4. Rusted clouds turned the sky an ominous, deep orange.

## Activity 9: Short-burst writing

Now we have seen the model and looked at some of the tools, I want you to have a go at writing a setting description using this image.



Try to use some of the tools we have talked about so far and perhaps magpie some language from our story or the sentences above.

**Here are some ways of starting:**

- *When I woke up, an incredible scene lay before me ...*
- *The skyscrapers ...*
- *Through a small window in the high tower, she could see ...*
- *Clouds swirled above the city of Gargantis ...*

★ **Over to you! We want a 'short-burst' of writing without doing too much planning or thinking. Try and let the writing flow and describe different parts of the picture. Five minutes is enough; then read through and tweak what you have written – make the scene come alive.**



## Activity 10: New ideas for your warning story

Now comes the fun part! You might already have the beginnings of an idea for your story from what you have read so far. If not, don't worry; we are going to generate our ideas one step at a time. Here are two choices for you:

- ★ A real-life style of story based on *Keep off the Tracks!* that hugs pretty closely to the model e.g. *scary woods, going out late at night, rope swing at canal, cliffs, building site ...*
- ★ A story set in the world of a book you know. You still have a warning and a danger but you can use some of the characters, settings and objects from your book e.g. *Narnia, Harry Potter, your class novel, etc.*

There are 4 key things you will need to do for your new story:

- 1) Choose the dangerous place
- 2) Select the main character or characters
- 3) Decide who or what gives the warning
- 4) Decide on what the weather will be like

### 1. The dangerous place: choose one from below or make up your own



## 2) The main character or characters

It makes sense for the central character to be a child. You could have one child on their own, friends, cousins or siblings. Knowing their characteristics will be important.

## 3) Who or what gives the warning



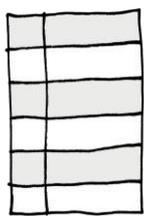
## 4) The weather



Pop your ideas in the boxes below or on a separate piece of paper:

Dangerous place	Who/what gives the warning
Main character(s)	Weather

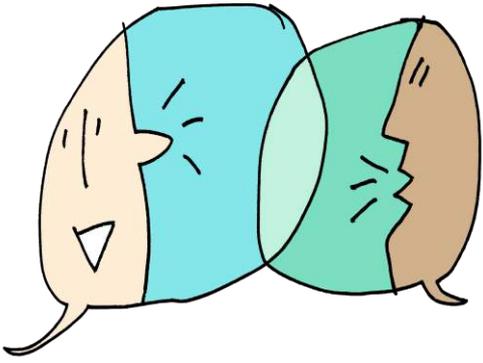
## Activity 11: Planning



Now it is time to get planning! Write your ideas in bullet points. The more you get on your plan, the easier your writing will be! If you want more paragraphs or sections you could split some of the boxes in two or plan in your own way. If you are feeling really confident about your story, you could skip this step and go for it. Sometimes having a go and then re-reading and writing can work well.

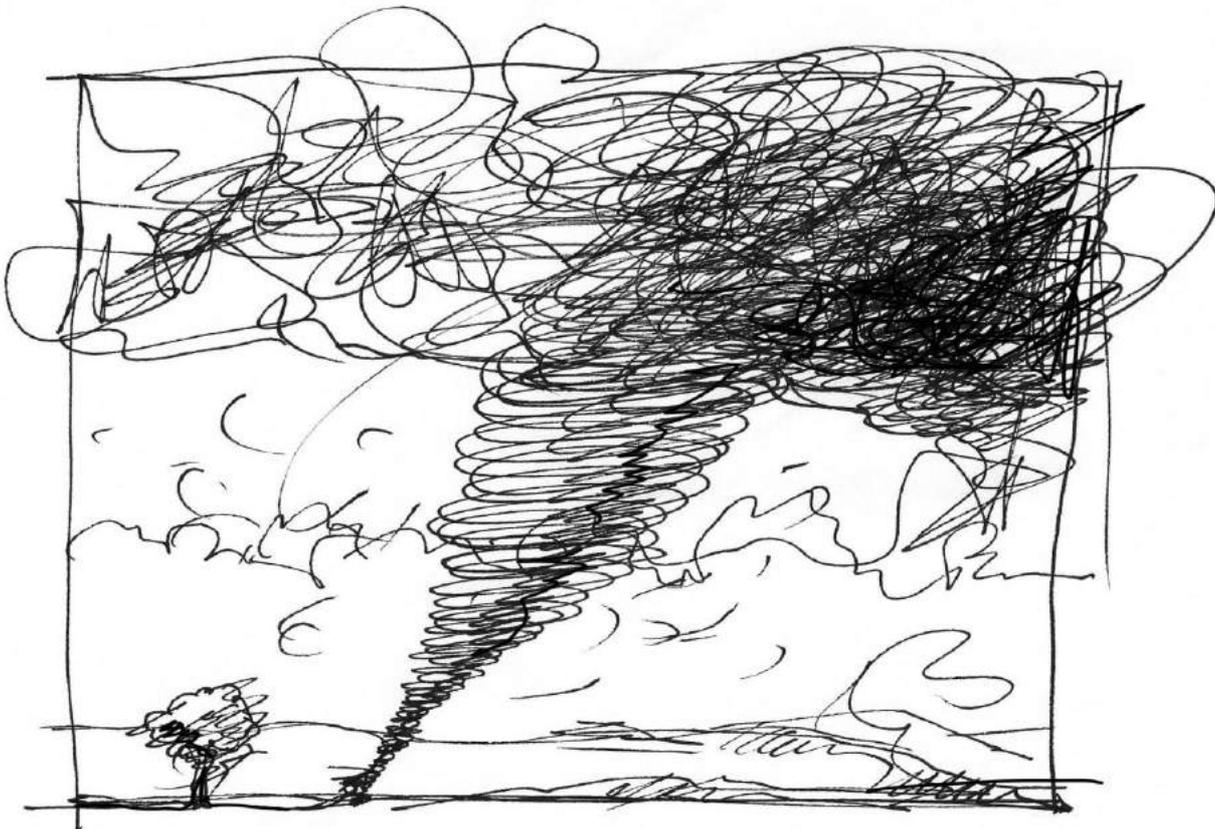
<b>Underlying pattern of a warning story</b>	<b>Title of your story:</b>
<b>Opening</b> MC warned Hint will ignore it	
<b>Build-up</b> MC arrives at setting Setting described	
<b>Dilemma</b> MC gets into serious danger	
<b>Resolution</b> Rescue or solution	
<b>Ending</b> MC safe Told off/scolded MC learnt a lesson	

## Activity 12: Talk your plan through



It is really important to have a good read through your plan to make sure that it makes sense. Why not read it aloud to someone in your house and see if they have any suggestions for how to improve it.

## Activity 13: Draw your scene



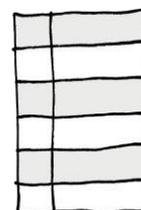
Many authors talk about the importance of being able to picture the story in their heads and often draw particular characters, objects or scenes to help them come to life. Why not have a go at drawing the part of your story where the characters are in danger. You could think about the weather, the setting, where the characters are and how they might be looking. Remember the weather and the settings should reflect a dangerous mood.

## Activity 14: It's time to write your story!

You can write the story all in one go or you may prefer to write a paragraph at a time and then read and reflect. Sometimes new ideas come to you as you are writing. You can adapt the plan adding in extra characters etc. Do make sure to read and edit as you write.

Here are some ideas from this unit to help you with your writing:

- ✓ The model text - *Keep off the tracks!*
- ✓ The toolkit for description
- ✓ The sentence imitation game
- ✓ Your ideas page and the photographs
- ✓ Your short-burst writing
- ✓ And, most importantly, your plan!



## Activity 15: Extension writing

There are lots of choices for extra bits of writing that go with *Keep off the tracks!* Here are some examples for you to choose from or you could think up your own:

- ★ A diary entry for one of the boys or Dad
- ★ A new warning story featuring two girls
- ★ A newspaper report about the incident
- ★ A visit from the railway police
- ★ A new story about another problem the boys get into
- ★ A sorry letter from one of the boys to Dad
- ★ A warning poster telling people to stay off the tracks
- ★ A discussion: Should Y5 children be allowed out on their own?

## Warm-up game : The answers

1) I am not alive but I grow. I don't have lungs but I need air. Water kills me. What am I?

**Fire**

2) I make two people out of one. What am I?

**A mirror**

3) I am white when I am dirty and black when I am clean. What am I?

**A blackboard**

4) This is light as a feather yet no-one can hold it for long. What is it?

**Your breath**

5) The more you take away the bigger I become. What am I?

**A hole**

6) I have hands but I cannot scratch myself. What am I?

**A clock**

7) I can be cracked. I can be made. I can be told. I can be played. What am I?

**A joke**

8) I am tall when I am new and short when I am old. What am I?

**A candle or a pencil**

9) I have a little house in which I live all alone. It has no doors or windows and if I want to go out I must break through the wall. What am I?

**A chick in an egg**

10) I am strong enough to sink ships but I fear the sun. What am I?

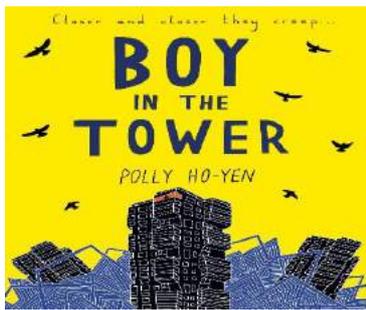
**Ice**

## Activity 4: Match the vocabulary to its definition - Answers

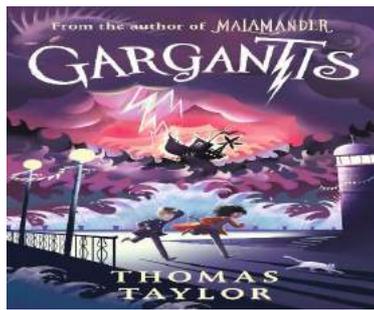
Word	Definition
<b>blur</b>	<i>to make an outline indistinct, hazy or smudged</i>
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<b>triumphantly</b>	<i>having achieved victory or success</i>
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<b>discarded</b>	<i>to cast aside or get rid of</i>
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<b>bowed</b>	<i>to lower or bend forward</i>
<b>blaring</b>	<i>to emit a loud, raucous noise</i>
<b>jammed</b>	<i>to become stuck or wedged</i>
<b>illegal</b>	<i>against the law and therefore forbidden</i>

# Book recommendations

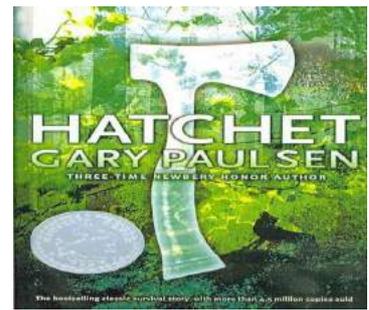
Below are some action/adventure books that I would recommend for Year 5/6.



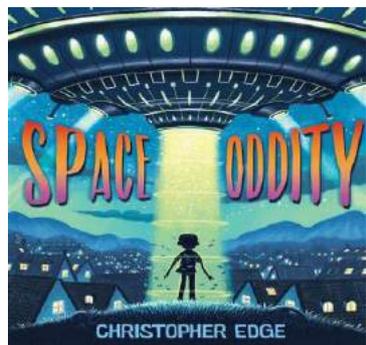
*Boy in the Tower*  
by Polly Ho-Yen



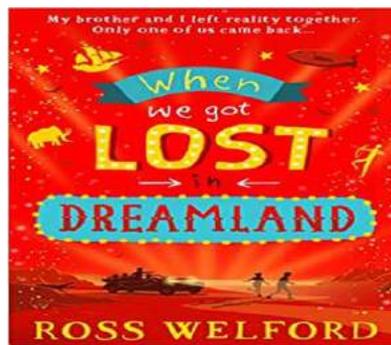
*Gargantis*  
by Thomas Taylor



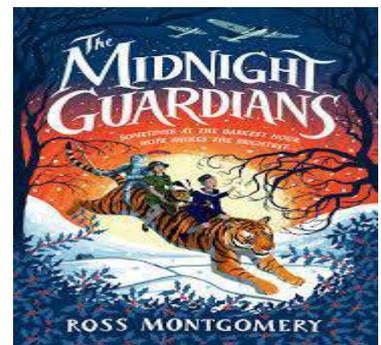
*Hatchett*  
by Gary Paulsen



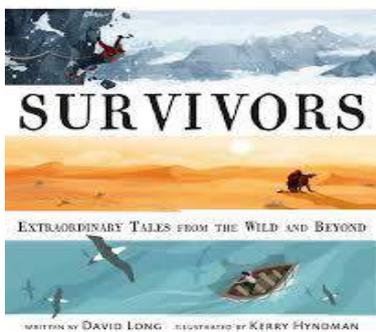
*Space Oddity*  
by Christopher Edge



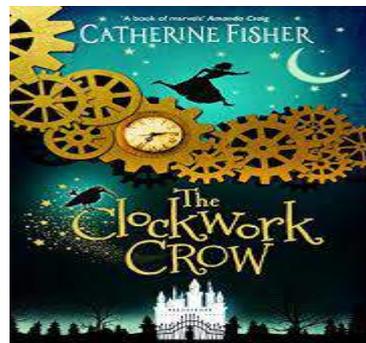
*When we got lost in Dreamland*  
by Ross Welford



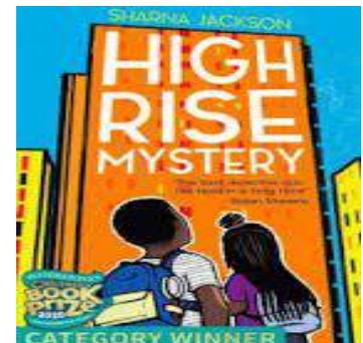
*Midnight Guardians*  
by Ross Montgomery



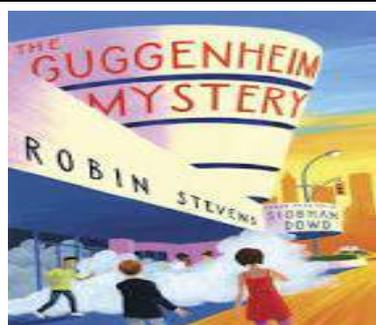
*Survivors*  
by David Long



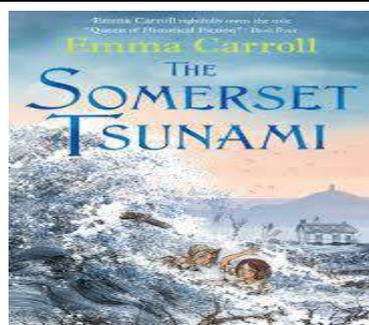
*The Clockwork Crow*  
by Catherine Fisher



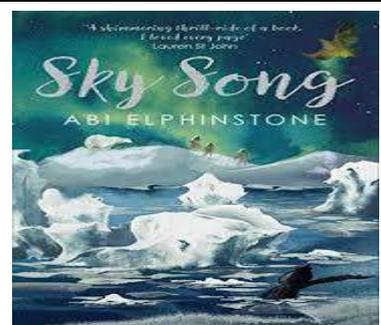
*High Rise Mystery*  
by Sharna Jackson



*Guggenheim Mystery*  
by Robyn Stevens



*The Somerset Tsunami*  
by Emma Carroll



*Sky Song*  
by Abi Elphinstone

**I hope you have enjoyed working through this workbook. Please share any work produced by tweeting me @MrWalkerPrimary**

This unit was written by James Walker, a primary school teacher and Talk for Writing Trainer from Bristol.

**Edited and designed by Julia Strong**

**Prepared for online distribution by Nick Batty**

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**Many thanks to Jon Ralphs for the cartoons: [jonralphs.com](http://jonralphs.com)**

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