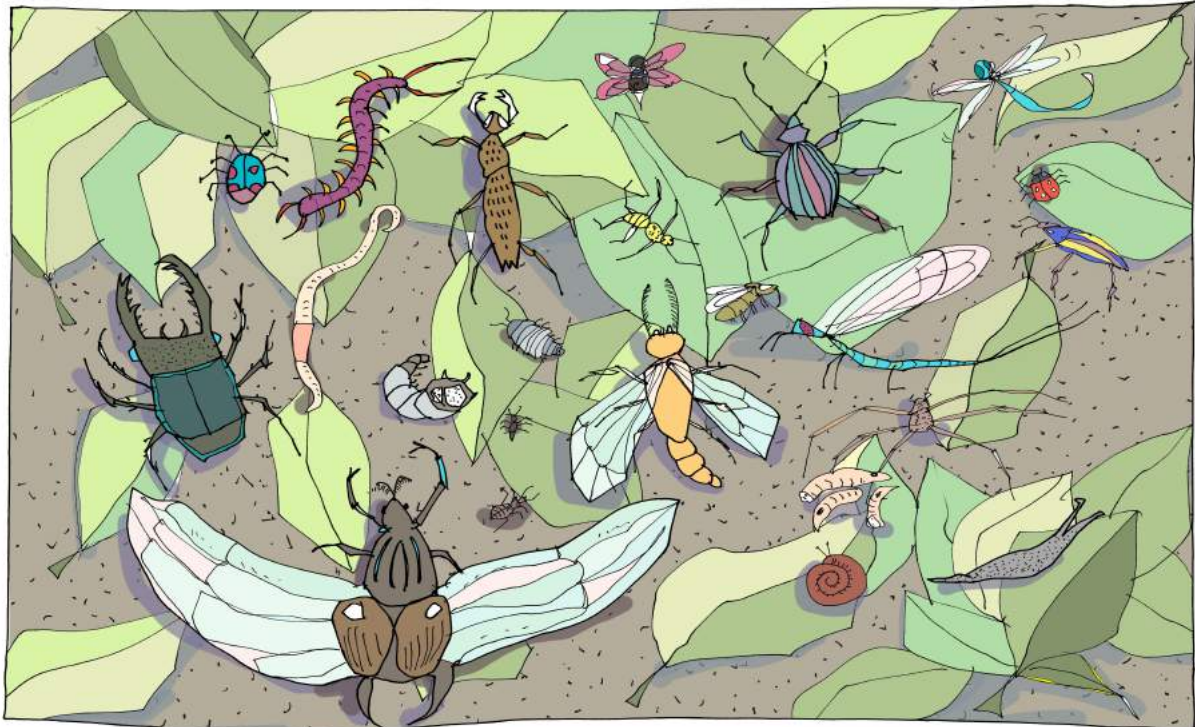




Insects Matter



Introduction

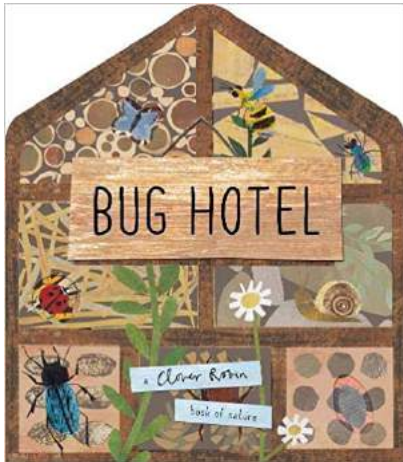
This Talk for Writing English unit aims to engage children in becoming effective writers about something they care about. Many children are fearful of insects. This unit is designed to build children’s understanding of how important and fascinating insects are while honing their descriptive and instruction writing skills.

By the end of the unit the pupils should:

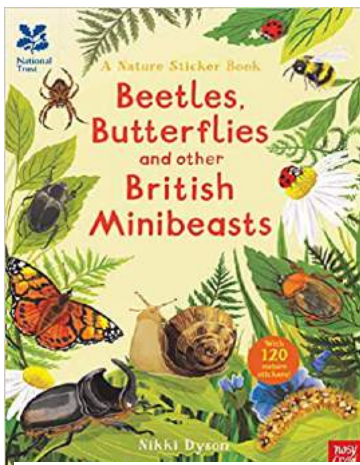
- **know that** insects play a central role in the continued development of life on earth and have an increased interest in insect life
- **be able to explain** simply why insects matter using the appropriate vocabulary
- **be able to make** a bug hotel to help create an environment that helps insects thrive
- **know how to write clear instructions** using the key writing tools effectively, alongside developing their descriptive writing skills.



Reading & website recommendations



Bug Hotel by Libby Waldon



National Trust:
Beetles, Butterflies and other Minibeasts by Nikki Dyson

RSPB *My First Book of Garden Bugs* by Mike Unwin



The Big Book of Bugs by Yuval Zommer

National Geographic Kids
Little Kids First Big Book of Bugs by Catherine D Hughes

- <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/insects-and-minibeasts/>

Cold task 1.

Ask the children to jot down their response to this question:

Why do insects matter?

A useful website to support feedback and discussion on this question is <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/insects-and-minibeasts/>



You may also want to use this text:

Insects are our friends not our enemies. Not only do they support life in the gardens and parks around where we live but they are essential to the natural world across the whole world. If all the insects disappeared, we too would disappear. And, of course, insects are very interesting.

Insects and all the minibeasts are a vital source of food for many creatures like birds and bats. One of the important things they do is to help pollinate fruit, flowers and crops. Moreover, many of them help dead plants to rot down and create rich soil for other plants to grow in.

Why not make certain that your school garden is an insect friendly habitat with lots of flowers to attract bees, butterflies, and all sorts of other insects, alongside places for the insects to live safe from predators?

Cold task 2.

Ask the children to write instructions unaided for anything that they already have written instructions for, or done recently. This will provide a baseline for how familiar they are with the key ingredients for writing instructions. You may want to warm this up by reminding them of something that they could write about but don't provide them with any hints about how to write instructions.



Hook ideas to grab the children's interest

- Take a trip out to your forest school and see what insects you can find.
- Read the book *Bug Hotel* by Libby Waldon.
- Use a bug catcher and microscope to collect samples of minibeasts from around the local area. Discover which bugs you have and how best to create a hotel for them.



Warming-up activities

Vocabulary: Warming up the vocabulary of a unit will always be a priority. Without the key words, the children won't be able to talk their way to understanding, let alone write down their ideas coherently.

environment survive
habitat predator destroy

When choosing to use a short informative text like the example above, it's a good idea to read it to the children then ask them to identify any words that need explaining, possibly getting children to discuss this in pairs. You can then create a bank of words and challenge the children to become familiar with them by the end of the unit. A good way of helping them do this is to have planned in advance which words they will need help with so you can provide a child-friendly alternative. For example, if you selected the word *vital*, tell the children that,

Vital means very important.

Next, spin that round: *If something is very important, it is ...* and pause for the children to say *vital*. Do this a few times and then ask the children to come up with other sentences with *vital* in them. If they use all the new vocabulary like this across the unit in a range of contexts, they will internalise all the new words.

Try to ensure that any introductory text you choose includes some of the more challenging words that you will later use in the model text for the unit (the text that you have chosen/written or adapted as a model for the type of writing you want the children to be able to do). The words *natural*, *predators* and *habitat* exist both in the text above and in the model text. The more the children see, hear and use words in different contexts, the more confidently they will be able to use them.



Observational short-burst writing



A sure-fire success for this unit will be short-burst writing based, hopefully, on an image of an insect that the children have seen on their trip to the woods. Given that the writing focus is instructions, but you also want to ignite interest in insects, this would be a good moment to use short-burst writing to embed the descriptive writing tools that you have taught in an earlier unit and introduce new ones.

On the next page is an example of how to shared write a spine poem. This is a powerful activity where children look at an image very closely (for example, a peacock butterfly) and decide on a few key features to focus on (listed in blue below) – which form the spine of the poem. The description is then developed by collecting ideas from the class and honing the effect of the description to illustrate specific writing tools.



Remember to ask the children what atmosphere they are trying to create. This will help them decide which words to select to describe these features because effective word choice relies on context. When collecting ideas, flipchart them and encourage the children to make a note of all the ideas in their magpie books (little notebooks where children jot down words and phrases that they can use later in their writing) so they have lots of ideas when they come to write their own version.



During the shared writing, keep reading the writing aloud to demonstrate how a writer regularly reads their work through and edits ideas until they achieve just the effect they want.

Painted eyes shimmer in the sun

like multi-coloured precious stones

Delicate wings demand the attention of passers-by.

Spindly antenna quiver in the wind.

The shadowy body flits from flower to flower.

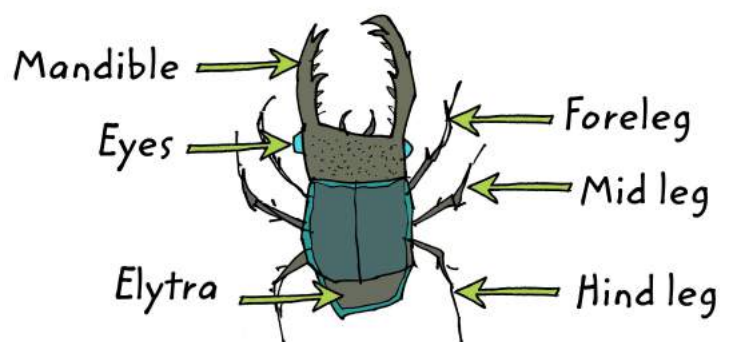
Here you can see that I was focusing on embedding the following four descriptive writing tools to strengthen the children's ability to really look at something and help the reader picture what is being described:

- Make every word count by selecting effective adjectives and verbs
- Include a touch of alliteration to help create the right atmosphere
- Add in a simile to help the reader picture the insect
- Extend the simile to add in further description or action.

When the children write their own versions, they should make sure they use these features. You will notice that the focus is on effective writing techniques, not on naming grammatical parts. Add in the relevant grammatical terminology as you teach the features and the children will very quickly understand the difference between a noun, a verb and an adjective. The key question is was it an effective noun, verb or adjective?

Once the children have done their own description following the shared writing, extend their interest in bugs by asking them to write a description of a bug that they like:

- What does it look like?
- How does it move?
- Where does it normally live?



Then ask them to draw a picture of the bug and label it.



The imitation stage

How to make a bug hotel

If you who are familiar with the TfW approach, you will know that the best way to help children have the words and phrases that they need to talk and write in the mode of the model text is for them to internalise the text from a text map before seeing it in written form. If you are not familiar with this,

then look at this film of Pie Corbett

explaining it: www.youtube.com/embed/p_NI2jD-5Es

or buy *Creating Storytellers and Writers* from Talk4Writing.com.



Bug hotel built by Olive, Bob & their dad in Hassocks, Sussex, during Lockdown 2020

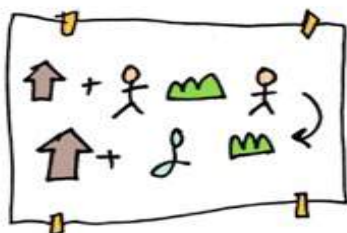
Draw a simple text map like the one on the next page to represent the key points in the model text. Don't try and include an image for every word – just include enough images to represent the gist of the text and emphasise the sentence signposts that join the text together. And don't try to turn it into a work of art – you are trying to help the children learn how to text map quickly.

Use actions to help the children remember the order of the content. As their confidence in saying the instructions grows, stress using a clear confident voice and expression so that the bossy verbs (the imperative commands) are very clear. As the children's expression improves, gradually start to withdraw so that the children take ownership of saying the instructions.



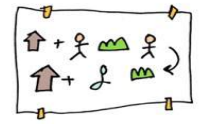
Once they've begun to internalise it, have fun with the text – split the class in half so they can listen to the other half tell the instructions. What do the children do well? What could be improved? Ask the children to give their recommendations.

Mime a line from the text – can the children guess what the line is. The children then have a go with their talk partner miming lines from the text to help them internalise it.



Ask the children to draw their own simple version of the text map. It is much easier to remember things from your own scribbled text map than from anyone else's

Using a text map to help the children internalise the model text



How to make a bug hotel.



You will need:

-
-
-
-
-
-

What to do:

- 1st,
- Next,
- Then
- Use
- Fill in the gaps
- finally,

Top tip:

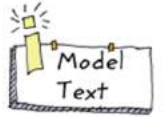




Reading the model text as a reader



Once the children have internalised the model text, now is the time to show them the text, which they should all be able to read because they are familiar with the words:



How to make a bug hotel

Insects and other minibeasts need safe habitats to shelter, hide from predators and raise their young. This is important because the world needs insects to help plants and animals survive. Would you like to help the insects by building a bug hotel? Follow these simple instructions and build one in your garden.

You will need:

- bricks
- dry leaves
- dead grass
- bits of bark
- wooden pallets
- twigs
- pinecones
- old roof tiles

What to do:

First, choose a good place to build your hotel. It should not be close to any vegetables in your garden.

Next, lay 4 bricks on the ground for your corners.

Then put a wooden pallet on top of the bricks.

Use bricks and more wooden pallets to build up your hotel.

Fill in the gaps with dry leaves, twigs, dead grass, pine cones and bits of bark.

Finally, add a roof to keep your hotel dry. Use old roof tiles to cover the top of your hotel.

Top tip:

You can build your bug hotel at any time of year, but you'll find lots of natural materials around in autumn. This is also the time when many animals look for cosy places to hibernate over winter.

The first thing to do when reading as a reader will be to check their understanding. Why not read through the instructions with the children and get them to identify any words they are uncertain of. Focusing on tier 2 vocabulary, use the technique outlined on page 4 above to begin to embed the words chosen.

Next, ask a few questions for them to discuss so they practise being able to talk about the text and demonstrate that they can comprehend it. For example:

Questions about the meaning of the text



- Where would be a good place to build a bug hotel?
- Why do you think the author tells us not to make a hotel near vegetables?
- Tell me why a good habitat is important for bugs.
- What materials are best to use to create a bug hotel?
- What do you think is the biggest threat to minibeasts in our gardens?
- Tell me why bugs having good habitats is important for human beings.

Questions about how the text has been written

- Why has the author included bullet points?
- Why has the author used subheadings?
- Why is instruction text full of imperative verbs?
- How many imperative verbs can you find in the model text? Can you name them?
- Who do you think this text is aimed at?



Bringing the text alive through drama

Now that we've all understood the text, let's explore it further through drama. Here are a few suggestions for what you could do:

- set up role play areas for the children to dress up as minibeasts. Include role-play masks and costumes
- debate: should we create resting places for all animals?
- use small world play to create a story about a bug without a home
- make puppets to act out what it would be like to stay in a bug hotel
- freeze frame the reaction of a range of bugs when they arrive at the bug hotel
- hot seating: ask the bugs – what do you look for in a hotel? Which hotel do you prefer and why? Why do you need a place to stay?

Furthering understanding

You might want to show two images of bug hotels and ask them which ones they prefer and why – challenge them to look at them from the perspective of the bugs who will live in them!




Reading as writer

The first thing to do when helping the children think about how to write any text is to help them understand how it is structured. Boxing up is a great way to do this because all the children have to do is create a grid and fill in each section with the headings that sum up the structure of the text. If the children are not familiar with doing this, the boxing up should be co-constructed with the class in front of them (preferably on a flip chart with the model text on screen so that the children can see how the model has been written). This will help them identify the bare bones of the underpinning structure. They can then use a similar structure to write new instructions.



Boxing up the structure of the text

Underlying bare bones of each section	Plan for new instructions 
Introduction: say what are you trying to achieve & include a persuasive hook	
You will need: list the items needed	
What to do: step by step instructions:	
Ending: include a Top tip	

Once the children have understood how to plan the writing, co-construct with them the key writing tools the writer has used in order to write effective instructions. With fiction writing there is a wide range of possible tools to choose from. With non-fiction writing it is much more a case of providing some

key tools that have to be used along with a few choices. Always provide examples from the model text to help the children understand the features, as illustrated below.

It's also worth noting that there is **some recyclable text that is often used** when writing instructions about anything – so this has been **highlighted in green**. Then there are the **generic sentences signposts that link text together** so these have been **highlighted in magenta**. The more children have the tune of this recyclable text in their heads, the more easily they will be able to say instructions clearly as well as write them down clearly.

Create an instruction writing toolkit

To write a set of instructions, it's useful to:



- **Start with a goal** – state what is to be achieved –
How to make a bug hotel
- **Include a persuasive hook** – **Would you like to help the insects by building a bug hotel?**
- **List the ingredients** and steps in order:
 - ✓ Use bullet points (like this list)
 - ✓ numbered points: **1,2, 3**
 - ✓ the alphabet: **a,b,c** so the reader can follow the steps chronologically
 - ✓ or use adverbials/adverbs to tell your reader the correct order – **First, ... Next, ... Then ... When ...**
- Use short, clear sentences so the reader does not become muddled – **Next, lay 4 bricks on the ground for your corners.**
- Use imperative verbs (bossy verbs) so the reader knows exactly what to do – **choose, lay, put, use, fill, add**
- Only use adjectives to add essential information or precision to the instructions – **dry leaves**
- Conclude the writing with a **top tip**, warning or where they can find further information to help the reader – **You can build your bug hotel at any time of year but you'll find lots of natural materials around in autumn.**



The innovation stage

Now the children have internalised the model text, comprehended it and analysed its structure and key writing ingredients, they can now innovate on what they've learnt and write a different set of instructions.

First, help them see how to plan their new instructions. Return to the boxed-up structure on your flip chart and, with the children's help, fill in the planner for new instructions. For the example below, we chose *How to grow your own herbs* because we had recently grown some herbs.

Planning the structure of new instruction text



Bare bones of each section	Plan for new instructions
Introduction: – say what are you trying to do – include persuasive hook	How to grow your own herbs Experience the joy of growing something
You will need: list the items needed	You will need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pots • selection of herb seeds • potting soil
What to do: step by step instructions:	What to do: First, Next, Then, After that, Finally,
Ending: include a Top tip	Top tip: Space herbs out so roots grow

Help the children to talk the text so that they take part in applying the approach to a new situation. Then shared write the text so they can see the writing process in action and understand how a writer makes decisions. Remember to keep reading the shared writing aloud so the children learn to read their work through and correct it as they go. Given that you are using fronted adverbials to begin several of the stages, make a big deal of the comma that separates off the adverbial from the sentence that it introduces so they automatically get in the habit of doing this. The Year 3 teacher will be very grateful when they teach them next year!



Independent application - the **Hot task**

Instruction writing doesn't lend itself to all sorts of different creative versions based on the same topic. So, you might want to jump the stage of the children 'having a go' at writing their own instructions for how to make a bug hotel. In which case, move straight on to the children choosing something that they know how to do and see if they can independently write effective instructions for how to do it. Help them to do this by illustrating how they can add another column to the boxed-up plan and use this to plan their new instructions.



Planning the structure of new instruction text

Underlying 'bare bones' of each section	Planner for instructions for growing herbs	Plan your new instructions
Introduction: state what are you trying to achieve include persuasive hook	How to grow your own herbs Experience the joy of growing something	
You will need: (list the items needed)	You will need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pots • selection of herb seeds • potting soil 	
What to do: (step-by-step instructions)	What to do: First, Next, Then, After that, Finally,	
Ending: include a Top tip	Top tip Space herbs out to let roots grow	

Writing the new instructions

The most important thing when writing instructions is to make certain that the instructions are in chronological order and clearly stated using imperative verbs. You might want to practise another set of instructions orally with the class, selecting something that everyone has done. For example, if you have made a cake together recently, you might choose that and get them to help you fill in the planner before talking the instructions together beginning

How to make a sponge cake.



Look back at your instruction toolkit (see page 12) and make certain the children know how to use all the features.

Encourage the children to talk their new planned instructions through to a partner before attempting to write them down. Once they have written them, ask them to share them with a partner and, using the toolkit to help them, decide if anything needs improving. Remember to ask them to see if the partners think they could follow the instructions.



Reflection on Learning

It's a good idea to go back to the **cold task** and get the children to compare the instructions that they wrote at the start of the unit with the instructions that they wrote at the end (the **hot task**). Hopefully, they will be able to see a significant improvement in their work.

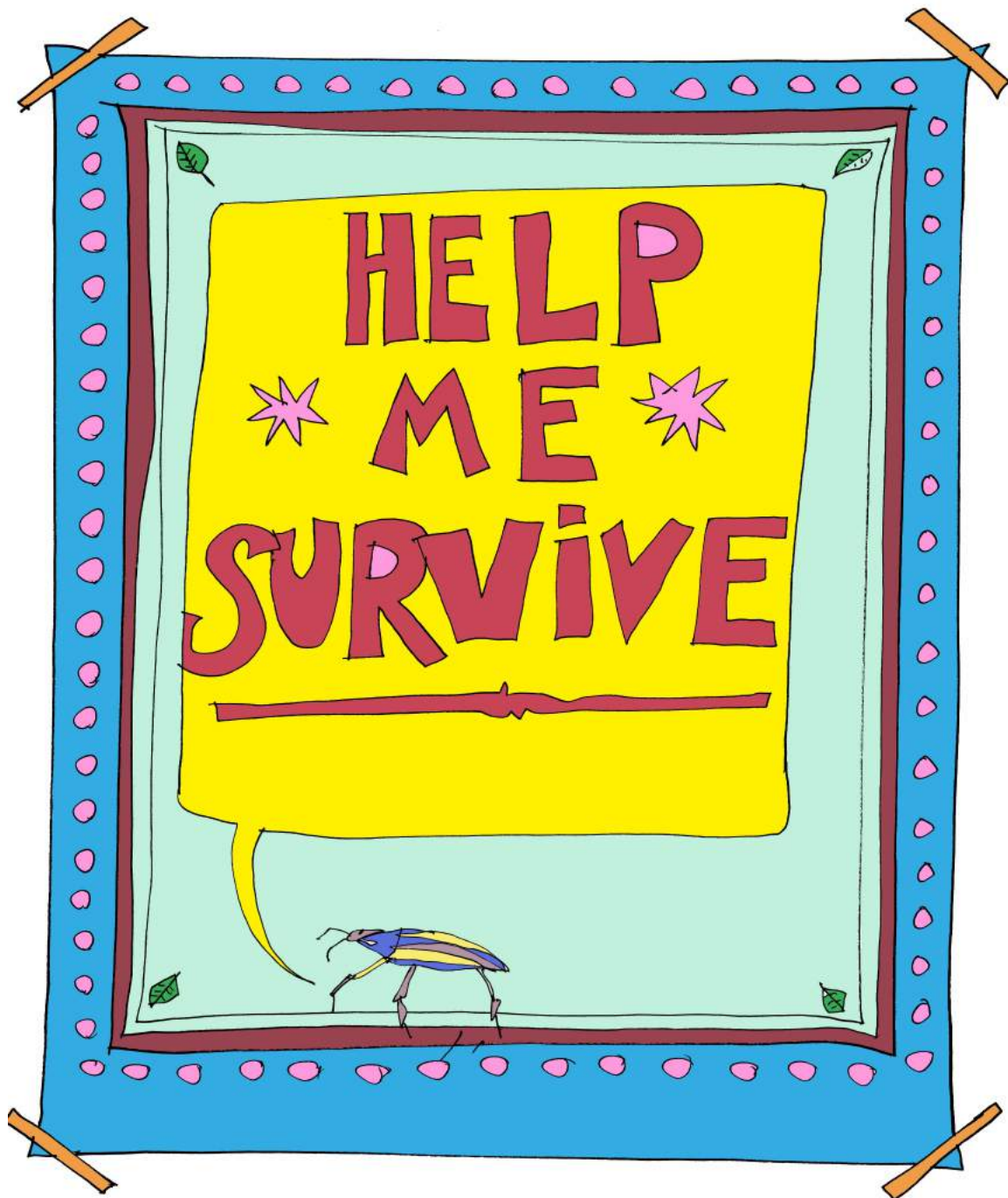
You might also want to return to the question you asked at the beginning: **"Why do insects matter?"** Ask them to write down how they would now answer that question. Then they could reflect in pairs on any differences between their first response and their final response before feeding back to the whole class. You may want to flipchart the key points and compare them with how they initially felt.

And don't forget to return to the word bank that you have developed across the unit and check that the children are confident users of these words.

Publishing their work



Hopefully, the bug hotels the children have helped to make are now a visible part of the school environment. If possible, find a noticeboard on a corridor to display the children's written work and drawings with a particular focus on why we all need to protect insects' habitats.





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Unit teaching content written by Jo Starr supported by Nasra Hussain (Montgomery Primary Academy, Birmingham – a Talk for Writing training school)

Unit guidance written by Julia Strong

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