



Talk for Writing consultant Jamie Thomas explains how a well-crafted model text, alongside daily, focused short-burst writing, can inspire ‘greater depth’ outcomes in writing. In this unit of work, children will explore how action not only enables writers to build excitement, but also enables us to connect and empathise with a character through internal thoughts and emotions. Below is the model text, teaching notes and worked examples.

The Catch

Below the spidery knot of trees and bushes, I sat, staring at the murky water, a single fish in my bowl. The weight of the world leant on my shoulders, dominating my thoughts. How would we survive? What could I do?

SNAP! An ear-splitting howl filled the air, shattering the silence. Tentatively, I crept towards the dense copse that lay before me. My arms were trembling; my heart pounded like a bass drum. I did not know what lay behind the wall of leaves, but I had to find out.

Parting the foliage, I caught a glimpse of the victim: a fire-like coat of red filled with rage, panic and desperation. Man-made metal teeth held her captive. Without thinking, I took my knife, jammed it into the snare and prized it open. In an instant, the fox disappeared towards the lake...towards the bowl...towards my fish! Tearing after her, worry began to flood over me. What if she ate my only catch? Our eyes locked across the bowl, the fish in her jaw. Silence. Then she was gone.

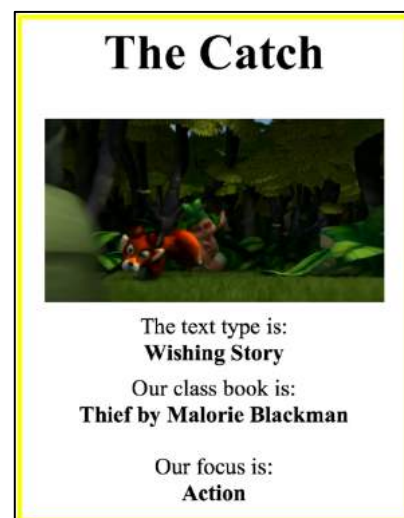
“Come back you scoundrel! That’s my fish!” In front of me, a labyrinth of thorns mocked me, daring me to enter – but rage spurred me on. Like a hunter, I bounded after my prey. Deeper and deeper I tunnelled in pursuit of the cunning thief, until I was blinded and alone.

“He...ll...o? Is...any...one...there?” As the fog lifted, I saw the jaw-dropping sight that lay before me: a glistening lake full of fish. The fox smiled. My prayers had been answered.

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The Catch – getting the model right

The Catch is a model text based on a short, animated film by Josh Carroll and Scott McWhinnie, written to explicitly explore the variety of ways that action can be explored in narrative. Its initial purpose was to help Y6 pupils at Warren Road Primary School develop their use of action beyond the concept of creating excitement or energy. What lies at the heart of the unit of work is the way that action can be explored through a character's internal voice, their thoughts, what they say, as well as what they do. This model was enhanced by the class book that we were reading alongside this unit: Malorie Blackman's *Thief*.



The thinking behind the models:

In this unit, there are in fact two model texts. The first (see page 1) is the model that the pupils story map and learn off by heart. It has been written to explicitly show how the tools for action can be contextualised within a short narrative. Each tool has been used to have an effect on the reader, whether it be to generate pace, build intrigue, advance the action or deepen their understanding of the events as they unfold. The text is deliberately short (258 words) so that the pupils can quickly internalise the key features and patterns in order to add these to their own repertoire as writers. As with all model texts, the teacher would need to adapt the sophistication of the model to meet the needs of their class.

The second model text (see page 13) is an embellished version of the first that is later explored with the pupils during the 'Reading as a Reader' phase (see section 7 below). This model explores character perspective, with a second voice sharing the storytelling responsibility. This additional tool enhances the action by giving the reader an insight into the thoughts and emotions of both characters in the story as it unfolds. To be able to balance these voices, ensuring that the action is continually developed and not simply repeated through the second voice, provides a significant challenge for the pupils.

The Teaching Sequence: The Imitation stage

1) The Hook

A well-chosen hook can be a gateway into a child's imagination. It can allow them time to dwell on something and consider a life away from their own. When I first began Talk for Writing, two of Pie's signature sentences stuck in my brain. They were: 'you can't create or imagine something out of nothing' and 'your imagination is the manipulation of what you already know.' In a world where many pupils fail to stop and look at the amazing things that are all around them, it is our responsibility to open their eyes and take note. A cleverly manufactured hook will not only capture their imagination, it will also potentially provide a purpose and audience for their writing.

The wonderful thing about basing a unit of work around a wordless animation or picture book is that the story is already there for the pupils to engage with and develop. Therefore, in this unit, the short animation acts as both the hook and the stimulus for the cold task: <https://vimeo.com/76356335>

2) The 'Cold Task'

The point of the 'cold task' is to provide the pupils with an opportunity to show you how successful they can be around the area of focus, in this case: action. It is important to not see this as a test – we do not want them to fail. Before they write, spend time discussing what tools they have previously been taught about action. You may like to discuss books and stories that they identify as being rich in action and explore what makes these successful. Activating the pupils' memory is an essential element of the 'cold task' as it will enable the pupils to give a true representation of what they can do, not just what they can remember. However, it is also important that we do not start teaching at this stage as we do want to use the written outcomes as an assessment tool for the unit that follows.

I often like to help the pupils activate prior learning by providing a simple model and asking them to discuss how effective it is. For example:

He heard them coming. He ran. He got away.

Is this a well-written piece of action writing? Explain your reasons.

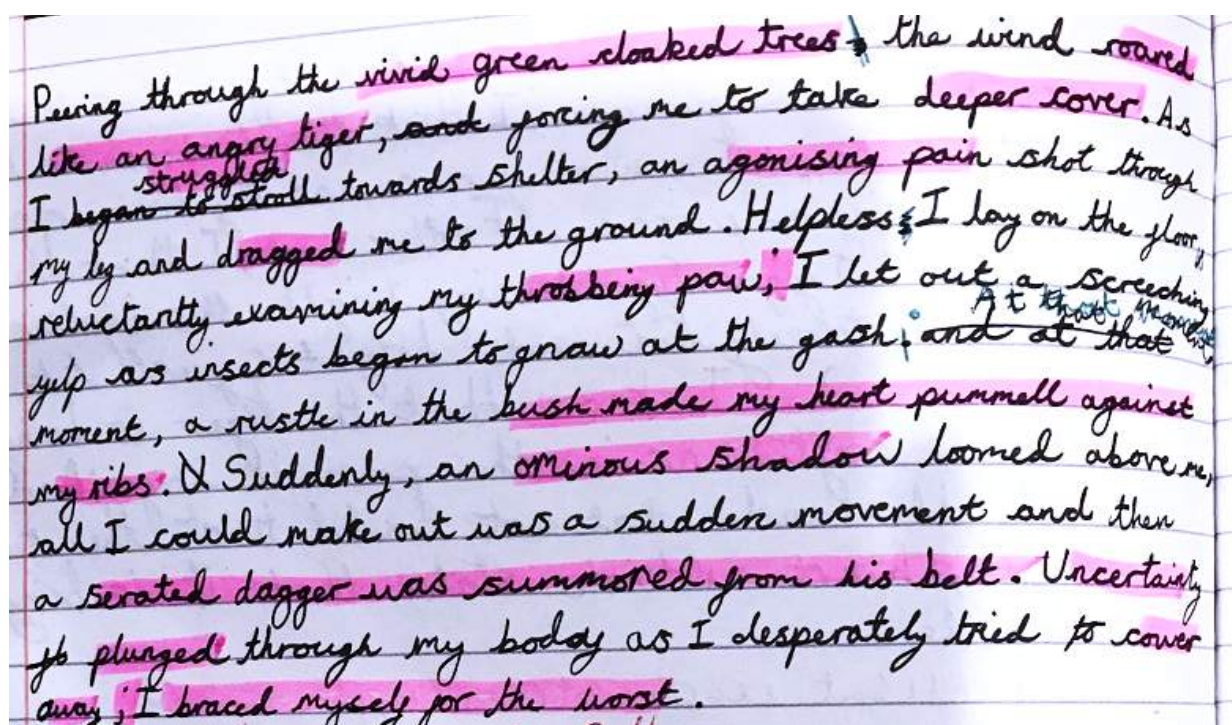
Through discussion as a class, the pupils quickly recall the key elements that develop action in narrative and are therefore tuned in prior to writing. They then have a short amount of time, say around 20 minutes, to demonstrate these skills.

The cold tasks act as an assessment for learning tool. Having read them, the teacher needs to ask themselves:

- What does my whole class need to be taught about action?
- What do different groups of pupils need to be taught?
- What individual skills and targets can I set for each pupil?

This assessment will then drive the teaching that follows, with the teacher planning short-burst writing opportunities to explore and practise the key tools and techniques required by their class. It may also be necessary to tweak and adapt the model text to ensure that all of the tools being taught are contextualised.

Here is an example of an extract from a Y6 child's cold task:



Peering through the vivid green cloaked trees, the wind roared like an angry tiger, and forcing me to take deeper cover. As I began to ^{struggle} stalk towards shelter, an agonising pain shot through my leg and dragged me to the ground. Helpless, I lay on the floor, reluctantly examining my throbbing paw. I let out a screeching yelp as insects began to grow at the gash, and at that moment, a rustle in the bush made my heart pummel against my ribs. Suddenly, an ominous shadow loomed above me, all I could make out was a sudden movement and then a serrated dagger was summoned from his belt. Uncertainty ~~it~~ plunged through my body as I desperately tried to cover away; I braced myself for the worst.

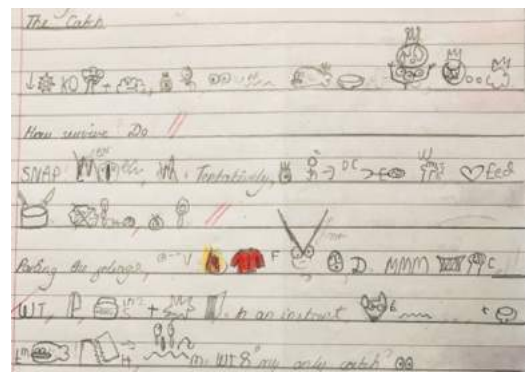
In the example above, the pupil clearly demonstrates an ability to mirror the feelings of the main character through the setting, using vocabulary choice and personification to enhance the mood. They also demonstrate a strong understanding of how to 'show' not 'tell' – hinting at the character's feelings through their actions, e.g. *peering*, *struggled*, *reluctantly examining*, *plunged through my body*, etc. This was fairly typical of the skills of the class.

In order to develop them further, I would want to teach them how to manipulate sentence length and construction in order to affect the reader. This would include skills such as the use of repetition to build tension and how short, snappy sentences can create an uneasy atmosphere. I would also want to teach them how to use speech to advance the action and show emotion.

3) Story mapping and internalising the model

I would always begin by retelling the story aloud to the class, modelling how expression and tone enhances the storytelling, generating excitement and anticipation. It is essential that the pupils hear the model text in its entirety before they begin to learn it as this will support them in their own understanding. It is also essential that the teacher knows the model off-by-heart so that they model the expectation and immerse the children in the act of storytelling.

In order to support the pupils in the internalising of the model, draw story maps and add in key actions. Getting the pupils to quickly map the story will help them to internalise and learn it. Remember – the map and actions are there as an aide memoire and should be kept to a minimum.



4) Deepening understanding through drama

Drama is a key strategy to help pupils deepen their imaginative engagement with a story. It can also help to have pupils writing in-role as if they were one of the characters. Here is a bank of possible drama activities:

- **Freeze frames:** working in small groups, the pupils take each paragraph in turn and create a freeze frame that captures essence of the story. Focus on body position and facial expression – show not tell.
- **Eyewitness, on-looker or spy:** in twos or threes, get the pupils to discuss what they saw from another character's perspective (e.g. a villager).
- **Hot seat MC:** interview each of the main characters and explore their intentions, emotions, motivations and desires. Encourage the class to ask questions that delve deep into the character's backstory.
- **Conscience alley:** tune in to the emotions and feelings of a character.
- **Jump into a scene – see, hear, feel, think:** as a scene is being performed, freeze the actors and 'jump in' to the scene, asking them to describe what they see, hear, feel or think at that precise moment.
- **Rumours about the MC:** like a game of Chinese Whispers, get the pupils to start spreading rumors about things they saw linked to the story.

5) Daily sentence work, contextualising grammar and punctuation

Plan into the model text a handful of key grammar focuses that the pupils can imitate and develop through daily sentence level work. Here are some of the elements that are contextualised in *The Catch*:

a) **Fronted adverbials:**

A selection of adverbials are used to add in extra detail linked to when, where and how an action takes place. Positioning the adverbial at the start of the sentence emphasises how the author has choices available to them other than the subject-verb sentence starter, which can be repetitive and laborious for the reader.

- **Where?** (Prepositional Phrases) *Below the spidery knot of trees and bushes, ... In front of me, ... Deeper and deeper, ...*
- **When?** *In an instant, ... As the fog lifted, ...*
- **How?** *Tentatively, ... Parting the foliage, ... Without thinking, ... Tearing after her, ... Like a hunter, ...*

b) **Rhetorical questions:**

Throughout the story, a series of rhetorical questions are used to connect the reader to the internal dilemmas that the main character faces as the story unfolds. This is not only an excellent tool to build suspense, it also acts as a cohesive device, providing a moment's pause to gather one's thoughts before the action continues.

How would we survive? What could I do? What if she ate my only catch?

c) **Use of repetition to build tension whilst advancing the action:**

In an instant, the fox disappeared beneath the verdant quilt towards the lake...towards the bowl...towards my fish!

d) **The use of colons and semi-colons to create coordinating sentences that intensify the action:**

- Semi-colon used to separate two independent clauses, while still demonstrating that a close relationship exists between them:
My arms were trembling; my heart pounded like a bass drum.
- Colons used to separate two independent clauses, where the second is an elaboration of the first and is being given additional emphasis:
Parting the foliage, I caught a glimpse of the victim: a fire-like coat of red filled with rage, panic and desperation.
As the fog lifted, I saw the jaw-dropping sight that lay before me: a glistening lake full of fish.

e) **Adding additional detail by extending the sentence using a non-finite clause (a sort of incomplete subordinate clause that has no tense):**

In the following examples, the added-on clauses act almost as an afterthought, showing you the thought-process of the character as they observe the action unfold before them.

- *Below the spidery knot of trees and bushes, I sat, staring at the murky water, a single fish in my bowl. The weight of the world leant on my shoulders, dominating my thoughts.*
- *An ear-splitting howl filled the air, shattering the silence.*
- *In front of me, a labyrinth of thorns mocked me, daring me to enter - but rage spurred me on.*

f) **Manipulating sentence length for a desired effect:**

Short sentences are used to break up the flow of the story, creating an edgy atmosphere.

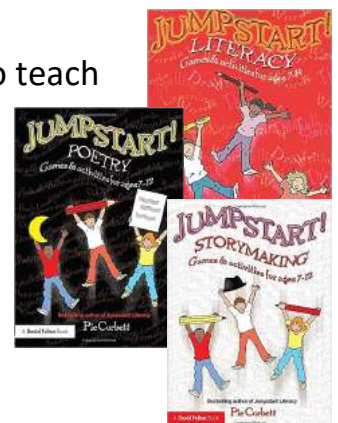
- *How would we survive? What could I do?*
- *SNAP!*
- *Silence. Then she was gone*

In contrast, patterns of three are used to create pace and fluidity to the action.

- *Without thinking, I took my knife, jammed it into the snare and prized it open.*
- *In an instant, the fox disappeared towards the lake...towards the bowl...towards my fish!*

6) Short-burst writing

In addition to the daily sentence work, plan for opportunities to teach specific 'tools' linked to the focus of the unit, in this case action. Each 'tool' will provide the pupils with another technique that they could draw upon when they come to write their own stories. We refer to these as 'tools' as they provide choices for an author; they are not a list of rules that must be incorporated into their writing.



Remember to use the short-burst writing lessons to co-construct your toolkit (see 'Reading as a writer' on page 17). A wealth of games and activities can be found in the Jumpstart books – here are a few ideas:

a) Vary sentence length to affect the reader

- Either choose an extract from a class novel or write a brief paragraph that exemplifies the tools being explored. E.g.

Sid froze. He could hear their footsteps, heavy on the road, thudding along beside him. Without thinking, he spurred forwards, dodged into an alley and sprinted into the main road. He had lost them – the traffic roared past, but no one had followed him.

- Talk through the model line by line with the pupils, identifying the tools:
 - Use a character's reaction in a short, punchy sentence to show an immediate impact and build tension (*Sid froze.*)
 - Build the intensity by revealing what they can hear or feel with added detail (*He could hear their footsteps, heavy on the road, thudding along behind him.*)
 - Advance the action with a dramatic fronted adverbial (*Without thinking,*)
 - Generate pace with a sentence of 3 (*He spurred forwards, dodged into an alley and sprinted into the main road.*)
 - Connect ideas with punctuation that keeps the reader guessing (*He had lost them – the traffic roared past but no-one had followed him.*)
- Through shared short-burst writing, model how to use these tools in another context.
- Provide opportunity for the pupils to repeat the activity, exploring their own action scenes.

b) Mirror the character's feelings through the setting

- Either choose an extract from a class novel or write a brief paragraph that exemplifies the tools being explored, building upon and contextualising previous tools. For this unit, I wrote:

Later, she woke with a start. The sun had slipped behind the trees, casting charred shadows across the water's oily surface. A cold breeze whispered through the reeds. Jo shuddered. A twig broke, leaves rustled and something moved towards her! What was it?

Jo ran. Branches whipped at her face and brambles tore at her feet. She was sure that she could hear something behind her, its feet thudding through the undergrowth – something breathing.

- Encourage pupils to identify the tools previously discussed but also identify any new tools connected to action, e.g.

- Mirror the character's feelings through the setting (*The sun had slipped behind the trees, casting charred shadows across the water's oily surface.*)
- Bring the setting to life through personification to intensify the scene (*A cold breeze whispered through the reeds.*)
- Give the pupils time to experiment with the tools, crafting short passages and analysing their effect on the reader. Here is an example from a Y6 child, practising using the tools identified:

The eerie sound of footsteps waddled in her blood, tore through her skin, gnawed at her bones and jeopardized her soul. They thudded louder with every flaming heartbeat, targeting me amongst the towering, telescopic trees. A hair-raising shriek engulfed the trepid night, as a vortex of agony possessed her. A tremor of flamboyant fear surged through her mind. A cold breeze whispered to her within the woods which flanked her, as all remnants of happiness deteriorated. Two white lights murdered the crepuscular night, shattering her heart - all of her attempts had been inept. They had found her...

c) Vary the adverbial to add specific detail to the action

- Begin by giving the pupils a simple sentence. Here I chose *Bertie dug a deep hole.*
- Explore a number of similar sentences and discuss how they alter the initial sentence:
 - *After tea, Bertie dug a deep hole.* (Use a fronted adverbial of time – when)
 - *In the garden, Bertie dug a deep hole.* (Use a prepositional phrase – where)
 - *Carefully, Bertie dug a deep hole.* (Use an adverb – how)
 - *As fast as a ferret, Bertie dug a deep hole.* (Use a simile – as or like)
 - *Hoping to reach Australia, Bertie dug a deep hole.* (Progressive -ing opener)
- Give the pupils another simple sentence, e.g. *Michu sat by the lake fishing.* Let them explore, adding in the different types of adverbial and discuss how it changes the meaning and impact of the sentence.

d) Balance description, action and dialogue

- Discuss the balance of description, action and dialogue and identify how dialogue can be used to reveal something about a character or advance the action.
- Through shared writing, model how to incorporate the three elements effectively, drawing on any previous toolkits around character and dialogue if taught.

All I could hear were their spiteful comments: "Loser! She can't even dodge a ball," they muttered under their breath, whilst crossing their arms, "She's still blushing." Their hateful words drove me further into a sea of loneliness, I wanted to cry, but they would just call me a 'cry baby.'

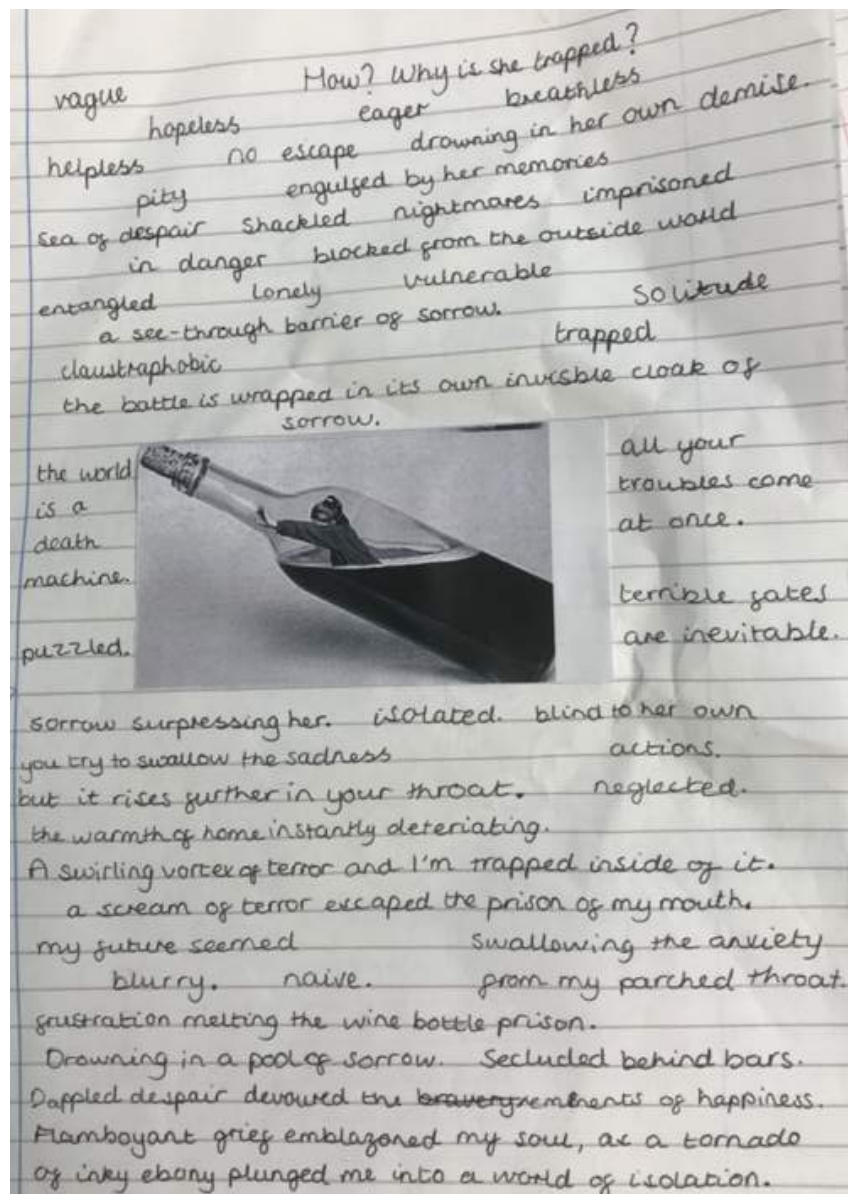


Give pupils time to explore the tools for themselves. The example below shows a Y6 child's short-burst writing paragraph, balancing description, action and dialogue:

Quivering, I paced sluggishly through the bustling hallway, the piercing sound of their menacing voices penetrating through my skin and into my heart. Stinging tears of anxiety brewed in my bloodshot eyes as their hateful remarks reached me and stabbed my soul. "Look at her - her disgusting, greasy hair is literally flying everywhere!" one sneered, her acquaintances cackling ^{spitefully} ~~despitefully~~. "I hope ugliness isn't contagious," Ivy hissed, her hand cupped over her mouth as those villainous words came spilling out. "Please, stop," I mumbled, my face glowing vibrant red. Ignoring me, the abuse continued.

e) Use poetry to strengthen creativity and connect with a character's inner feelings

- Using a visual stimulus that has a deep metaphorical meaning, discuss and brainstorm any language or emotions that it evokes. Encourage the pupils to capture and 'magpie' these ideas for themselves. The image here shows the brainstorm in a pupil's magpie book.

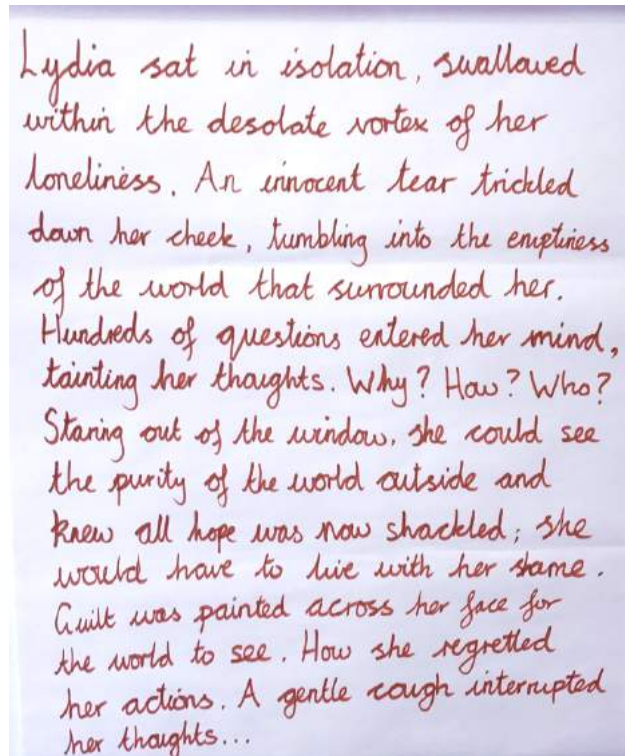
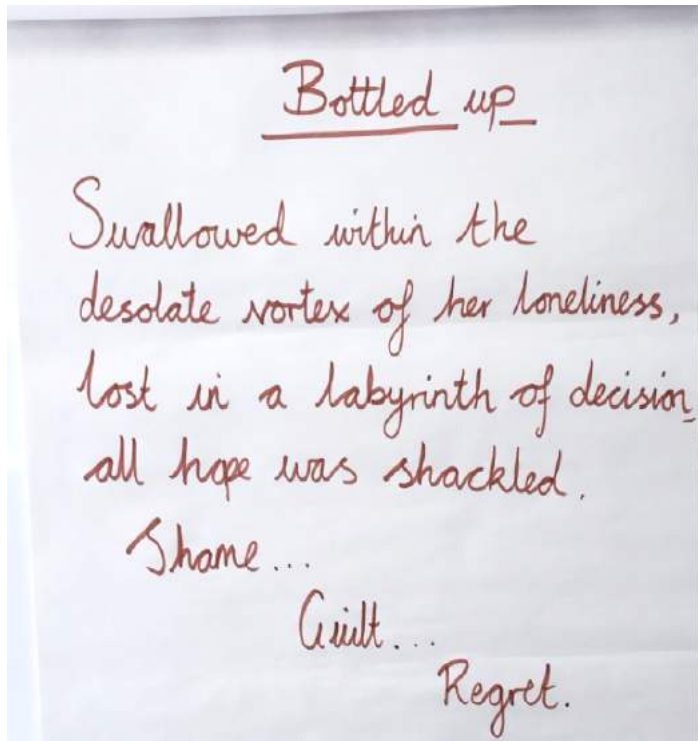


- Explore how action is not only what is happening on the outside but also the host of emotions and feelings that are evolving on the inside.

- Using the vocabulary generated, create short poems that focus on the words and their effect. Ensure that the pupils do not get hung up on writing narrative as this will take away from the impact the poem holds.

- Once the poem is complete, model how to turn this into a piece of prose, raiding the poem for vocabulary and content, whilst filling in the narrative.
- Then give the pupils time to create their own poems and turn them into their own pieces of narrative.

Here is the shared writing of a poem that I created with the class, alongside the prose that it was turned into.



The pupils then wrote their own poems and used them as a source of inspiration for prose. Here is an example from one of the children:

Trapped

Have you ever felt constricted and helplessly lifeless,
Staring into outer space, doom moulding into your chest?
Frustration will be surging like an avalanche of flames,
Devouring and relishing diminishing hope.

Whilst the stubborn bottle cork mocks and teases,
A waft of wonder finally starts to excitedly quiver,
Turning over and over ideas in the mind's eye,
Sparking light bulbs and melting the wine-bottle prison.

Once the clouds of dreams spontaneously melt and shiver,
Remnants of imagination seep into decision:
Surrender, option one, would lead to eternal custody,
Or perhaps unrelenting perseverance would come into hand.

After a victim is tangled in a snare of inevitable doom,
The mountain will forever clog the eluding streets of liberty,
A tassel of desperate desires to escape and victoriously rise,
Brewing wrath and stoutness to evade constant demise.

By Abby Ong, Y6

7) Reading as a reader (vocabulary and comprehension)

Once the pupils have internalised the model, read it with them as a reader, focusing on orally deepening understanding of vocabulary and comprehension. Should your pupils be ready for some additional challenge, explore the embellished text as this offers greater complexity.

The Catch (embellished version)

Beneath the forest's looming canopy, I sat, staring at the murky water that lay dead before me, a single fish in my bowl. The weight of the world leant on my shoulders, dominating my thoughts. How would we survive? What could I do?

I could tell that he was troubled right from the start. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted poor Michu despondently fishing beside the half-drained pool, his confidence slowly evaporating. Watching the boy intently, I willed for him to catch something, but as his rod burst to life and the catch was reeled in, disappointment masked hope. A tiddler dangled before his eyes, relentlessly mocking his futile mission; all confidence disappeared.

SNAP! An ear-splitting howl filled the air, shattering the silence, tearing me from my daydream. Tentatively, I crept towards the dense copse that lay before me. My arms were trembling in anticipation; my heart pounded like a bass drum. What lay behind the wall of leaves, I did not know, but I had to find out.

Parting the foliage, I caught a glimpse of the victim. A fire-like coat of red filled with rage, panic and desperation. Pressing in on her from all sides, it seemed that the forest was trying to trap her in its thorny grasp. However, man-made metal teeth had held her captive.

Fatal jaws tore into my leg, holding me captive. I yelped in pain and thrashed out to be released but, to my dismay, it only made the agony more unbearable. Suddenly, I realised I was not alone. Two mischievous eyes were transfixed on my desperate struggle, ominously standing over me, blade drawn.

Without thinking, I unsheathed my knife, jammed it into the snare and prized the trap open. In an instant, the fox disappeared beneath the verdant quilt towards the lake...towards the bowl...towards my fish! Scampering after her in hot-pursuit, worry began to flood over me. What if she ate my only catch? Our eyes locked across the bowl, the fish in her jaw. Silence. Calculation. Anticipation. Then she was gone.

I knew what I had to do. Charging from the undergrowth, I grabbed the pathetic fish in my teeth and darted into the forest, the boy close behind me. I sprinted past glowing leaves, quivering yellow petals and magnificent green cloaks. I jumped over piles of emeralds, thinking only of the joy that would be painted on Michu's face when he saw what lay in wait for him; joy that would dissipate his current rage.

“Come back you scoundrel! That’s my fish!” The dark forest enveloped my words, issuing no reply. In front of me, a labyrinth of thorns menacingly mocked me, daring me to enter - but rage possessed me, spurring me on. Like a hunter, I bounded after my prey, thorns tearing at my skin. Deeper and deeper I tunnelled in pursuit of the cunning thief. Deeper and deeper I chased her into the gnarled maze. Deeper and deeper I rampaged, until I was alone. A padded quilt of fog masked what lay before me. Blinded, exhausted and alone. Already I could feel my chest tightening as panic set in. “He..ll...o? Is...any...one...there?” A faint glimmer of light began to creep out of the gloom. As the light intensified, I masked my eyes to shield them from the utopia that lay before me. I was surrounded by a curtain of dancing water, cascading into a simmering cauldron of opportunity.

I looked at him and smiled.

My prayers had been answered.

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a) Vocabulary

Read the embellished story through, underlining challenging or unfamiliar vocabulary and discussing any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. Generate synonyms / antonyms and discuss ‘shades of meaning’, i.e. how strong one word is compared to another. Provide opportunities to use these words in context through word play and writing creative sentences.

b) Oral Comprehension

As a class, delve into the comprehension that lies beneath the surface of the story. Explore the text through oral enquiry, encouraging the pupils to discuss and share their thoughts, drawing on the evidence in the text to support their ideas. Whilst it is important that the pupils are empowered to steer their line of enquiry, it will be necessary to question them, deepen their ideas, ask for clarity and evidence and pose new lines of enquiry. The following list is merely a flavour of some of the questions you may explore:

Paragraphs 1 & 2:

- Who is telling the story? How do you know? How does this change?
- Write down 3 words or phrases that are used to describe how Michu is feeling.
- What impression does the sentence: 'The weight of the world leant on my shoulders, dominating my thoughts' create?

Paragraphs 3 & 4:

- How was Michu feeling as he approached the copse? How do you know?
- What adjectives/similes/personification has the author used to describe the scene? What effect do they have on the reader?

Paragraphs 5 & 6:

- 'Fatal jaws...' Why did the author use this metaphor?
- 'Mischievous...ominously standing' how do these words make the reader feel about Michu?

Paragraphs 7 & 8:

- 'Joy that would dissipate his current rage.' What does the word 'dissipate' mean in this context?
- What evidence is there of Michu being determined?
- How does Michu feel about the fox compared to their first encounter?

Paragraphs 9 & 10:

- Based on what you have read, what does the last paragraph suggest might happen next? Use evidence from the text to support your prediction.
- What is the main message of the story?
- The relationship of the two characters changes throughout the text. How does it change? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

8) Reading as a writer (structure and toolkit)

Having read the text as a reader, now re-read it as a writer. Identify the underlying sequence and pattern of the story and box it up with the class, labelling each section in sequence to capture its overall structure. Make sure that the underlying pattern uses generalisations as this will support innovation and breaking away from the model.

a) **Boxing up**

	The Catch (Key plot events)	Main idea	Possible innovation based on <i>Thief</i> by Malorie Blackman
OPENING	Michu sits fishing, staring at lake. Weight of the world on his shoulders – feels sad. Questions himself.	MC wants something badly.	Lydia is desperate not to lose her best friend Frankie and seeks to be accepted by a group of girls, The Cosmics, in her new school.
BUILD UP	Michu hears something. He approaches and sees fox trapped in snare.	MC is having no luck. Something grabs their attention.	The Cosmics make fun of Lydia. Frankie ignores her. Lydia is told to steal a cup to be accepted into the gang.
PROBLEM	Michu sets fox free. Fox runs off and snatches fish. Michu and fox stare at one another. Fox disappears into forest.	MC is prevented by some sort of difficulty preventing them from their wish coming true.	Lydia battles her inner conscience.
ACTION	Michu hesitates but decides to chase fox. Chase through forest, up mountain to empty location (the lake).	MC battles / overcomes the difficulty.	Lydia dreams about the prospect of stealing the cup. She sneaks into school and is chased.
ENDING	Michu sees lake filled with giant fish. Fox and Michu form friendship and fulfil Michu's wish. Fox disappears.	MC gets what they wished for.	Lydia wakes up and is thankful it is all a dream. Frankie hears about the dare and turns her back on Cosmics.

b) Consolidate the toolkit (linked to the focus: action)

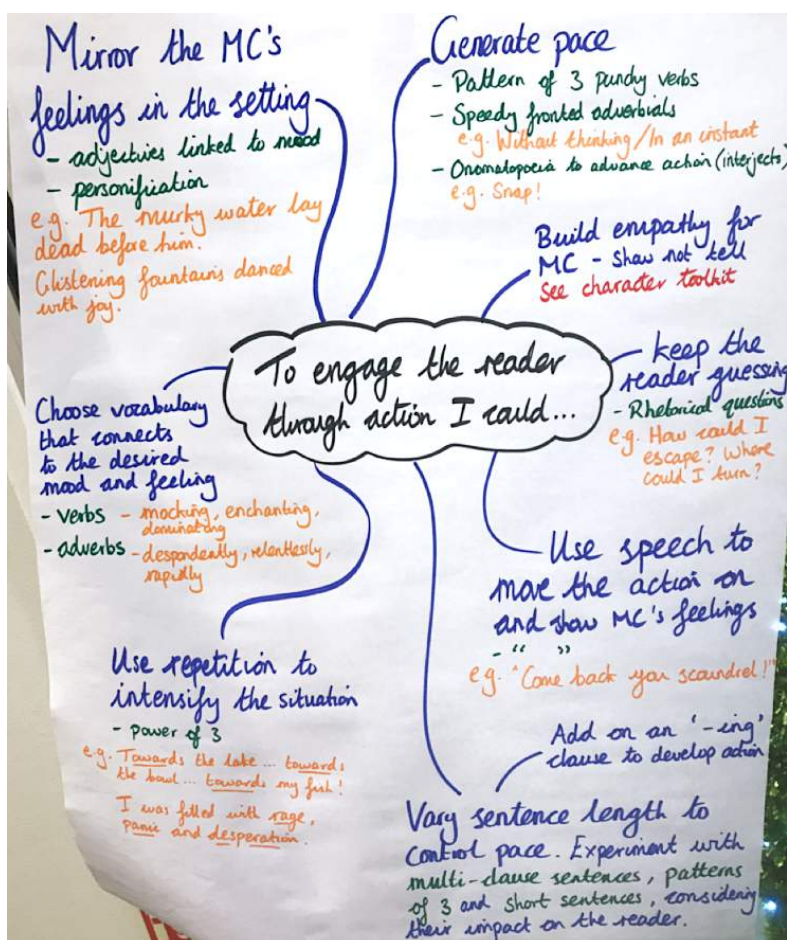
Having identified the underlying pattern and structure, re-read the text to identify the writer's tools. It helps if you slow the reading down, almost looking at it sentence-by-sentence. Tease out the tools that lend themselves to action and capture for future use. Remember – the toolkit must be co-constructed and should be added to daily throughout the unit as the tools are being taught. The purpose of the toolkit is to give the pupils a 'menu' of techniques that they can choose from. The more this skill is practised with the pupils, the more they will begin to do it independently, raiding their own reading for great words, turns of phrase and writerly tricks. Remember, in creative writing we are creating tools not rules. If we want pupils to perceive themselves as writers, it is essential that we treat them like writers.

Here is an example of an action toolkit once it has been co-constructed. Note the fact that the pupils are presented with the sentence, 'To engage the reader through action I could...'. This celebrates authorial choice and focuses on developing writing to create a desired effect. As you can see, the toolkit is colour coded: each tool is headlined in blue, ways of doing it (often grammatical) in green, and examples in orange.

Including examples is essential if the pupils are going to understand what is needed. The toolkit presents techniques that influence the reader, underpinned by the grammar that is instrumental in their construction. In creating this, the teacher has asked two questions:

- What effect is the writer trying to create?
- How do they do it?

As you co-construct the toolkit with the pupils, add in examples and then practise the skills through short-burst writing opportunities like those explained earlier.



Here are the some of the tools that are contextualised in *The Catch*:

Action Tool	Example from <i>The Catch</i> (embellished text)
<p>'Show' not 'tell' - reveal or hint at a character's feelings through their actions.</p> <p>Verbs Adverbs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>staring; despondently fishing; trudged; tiptoed; glanced; sighed; tearing me from my daydream; Tentatively, I crept; my arms were trembling in anticipation; my heart pounded like a bass drum; thrashed out to be released; darted into the forest; bounded; tunnelled in pursuit; rampaged; my chest tightening as panic set in; masked my eyes</i>
<p>Mirror the character's feelings through the setting.</p> <p>Bring the setting to life and give it energy.</p> <p>Personification</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>...the murky water that lay dead before me...</i> ● <i>...the forest was trying to trap her in its thorny grasp</i> ● <i>...quivering yellow petals...</i> ● <i>The dark forest enveloped forest enveloped my words, issuing no reply.</i> ● <i>...a labyrinth of thorns menacingly mocking me, daring me to enter...</i> ● <i>a curtain of dancing water, cascading...</i>
<p>Build tension and atmosphere.</p> <p>Short, tight, punchy sentences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How would we survive? What could I do?</i> ● <i>Snap!</i> ● <i>What if she ate my only catch?</i> ● <i>Silence. Calculation. Anticipation. Then she was gone.</i> ● <i>I knew what I had to do.</i>
<p>Advance the action.</p> <p>Dramatic fronted adverbials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Without thinking,</i> ● <i>In an instant,</i> ● <i>As the light intensified,</i>
<p>Generate pace using a power of 3.</p> <p>Commas in a list</p> <p>Use repetition to build tension whilst advancing the action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Without thinking, I unsheathed my knife, jammed it into the snare and prized the trap open.</i> ● <i>...towards the lake...towards the bowl...towards my fish!</i> ● <i>Silence. Calculation. Anticipation.</i> ● <i>I sprinted past glowing leaves, quivering yellow petals and magnificent green cloaks.</i> ● <i>Deeper and deeper I tunnelled in pursuit of the cunning thief. Deeper and deeper I chased her into the gnarled maze. Deeper and deeper I rampaged until I was alone.</i> ● <i>Blinded, exhausted and alone.</i>
<p>Use a character's reaction, internal thought or the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How would we survive? What could I do?</i> ● <i>I willed for him to catch something...</i>

<p>author's comments to show the effect of a description. Rhetorical question</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What lay behind the wall of leaves, I did not know, but I had to find out.</i> • <i>...worry began to flood over me. What if she ate my only catch?</i> • <i>Already I could feel my chest tightening as panic set in.</i> • <i>I masked my eyes to shield them from the utopia that lay before me.</i> • <i>I looked at him and smiled.</i> • <i>My prayers had been answered.</i>
<p>Choose vocabulary that connects to the desired mood and feeling. Adjectives Verbs Adverbs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>looming, murky, lay dead, dominating, despondently, half-drained pool, confidence slowly evaporating, disappointment masked hope, relentlessly mocking his futile mission, all confidence disappeared, ear-splitting howl, shattering the silence, tearing, tentatively, dense copse, trembling in anticipation, victim, rage, panic, desperation, thorny grasp, held her captive, fatal jaws tore, yelled, thrashed out to be released, to my dismay, agony, unbearable, mischievous eyes, transfixed on my desperate struggle, ominously standing over me, silence, calculation, anticipation, pathetic fish, dissipate his current rage, enveloped my words, menacingly mocked, daring to enter, chest tightening as panic set in, faint glimmer, simmering cauldron of opportunity.</i>
<p>Advance the action and show emotion through speech.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Come back you scoundrel!"</i> • <i>"He..ll...o? Is...any...one...there?"</i>

c) Drawing upon other reading – expanding the repertoire

Whilst the model text is rich in action tools and writerly techniques, it is essential that we also explore a wide range of other literature to enrich and deepen our repertoire. Draw upon your own knowledge of quality pupils' literature to share an array of extracts that have depth in action. Encourage pupils to raid the reading, looking for additional techniques that can be added to the toolkit. If they have 'magpie books', encourage them to jot down key ideas, language and turns of phrase. The more this is explicitly modelled to the pupils, the more likely they are to do it habitually.

The Teaching Sequence: The Innovation stage

9) Shared and Guided Writing

Before writing, make sure that you brainstorm lots of ideas and possibilities for story writing. I like to spend time creating lists of characters that we could use and their potential desires and wants, e.g. a wizard wanting to know how to cast a spell, a child seeking social acceptance, or an archaeologist seeking a hidden artefact. To strengthen the brainstorm, I usually encourage the pupils to draw upon their reading, using characters they adore as an inspiration for their own story. This is where the stimulus for our innovation came from – our class book *Thief* by Malorie Blackman.

Below is the class boxed up version and a pupil's innovation plan.

Underlying Pattern	Innovation - Thief
O P E N I N G MC Wants something	Lydia Henson Social acceptance The Cosmic's - peer pressure Wants Frankie back <i>Send a text Snapchat note</i> <i>2nd Perspective</i>
B U I L D U P MC drawn to something → curious Should I or shouldn't I?	Anne - manipulative tells Lydia to steal cup ↳ faced with tough decision ?
P R O B L E M MC comes face to face with Problem	Lydia confused Talks to herself about her choices - pros and cons <i>- Diary</i> <i>- Sports cup</i> <i>- talk to reader</i> <i>- soliloquy</i> <i>- Stream of consciousness</i>
A C T I O N MC makes choice ↳ action	Lydia has a nightmare about stealing the cup <i>Present tense</i>
E N D I N G MC gets what they want	Frankie hears about Anne's plan and apologises ↳ friends again

Boxing up the text
LI: To plan my own story.

	The Catch	Main Idea	My innovation plan
O P E N I N G	Michu sits fishing, staring at lake. Weight of the world on his shoulders - feels sad. Questions himself.	MC wants something badly.	MC = Lydia • Wants to belong (to Cosmic's) • Wants to be friends with Frankie • Sends text message INFORMAL: Soz. Cant.
B U I L D U P	Michu hears something. He approaches and sees fox trapped in snare.	MC is having no luck. Something grabs their attention.	• MC under pressure. • Shall I or not? • Take cup? • Anne tells her to steal. • Tough decision
P R O B L E M	Michu sets fox free. Fox runs off and snatches fish. Michu and fox stare at one another. Fox disappears into forest.	MC is prevented by some sort of difficulty preventing them from their wish coming true.	• Perspective of diary. • "I'm like in a bottle". • "Colour feeling..." • Invisible/unnoticeable.
A C T I O N	Michu hesitates, but decides to chase fox. Chase through forest, up mountain to empty location (the lake).	MC battles / overcomes the difficulty.	• Nightmare about taking cup • Present tense. • Short sentences for speed up pace. • Suspense.
E N D I N G / R E S O L U T I O N	Michu sees lake filled with giant fish. Fox and Michu form friendship and fulfill Michu's wish. Fox disappears.	MC gets what they wished for.	• Happy ending. • Frankie not part of Cosmic's anymore • Why. Apologises • Found out about Lydia's planing

In the planning stage, it is also important to explore additional levels of sophistication with the pupils so that, over time, they would have seen how to:

- **Make alterations** - change the course of events
- **Reorder the text** - e.g. flashbacks and time slips
- **Change the viewpoint** - retell as another character
- **Change time** - e.g. past → present, etc.
- **Genre switch** - manipulate the form, content and style

- **Blend text types** - fiction/non-fiction, plot patterns
- **Write sequels and prequels**
- **Write in the style of different authors**

During the shared writing, ensure that it is pitched suitably high for all the pupils in the class. By UKS2, they should be leaving the model behind and working off the basic plot idea and toolkit, as well as drawing on previous toolkits, their reading and their short-burst writing.



Below, is a transcript of the shared writing I constructed with my Y6 class for this unit. The shared writing was constructed over five days, allowing time to draw upon the short-burst writing and previous learning. As we co-constructed the class story, the children also drafted their own versions, adding in their own ideas and embellishing the story to suit their taste. The purpose of the Innovation stage is to ensure that all children are accurately using the toolkit with great effect. It is during this stage that the children received in-depth marking and feedback, addressing any misconceptions and also developing their authorial voice.

Thief by Year 6 (Class Innovation)

Chapter 1: The Dilemma

Have you ever felt trapped, confronted by the impossible choice? No matter what you decide, someone loses, someone gets hurt, someone suffers. Staring at my reflection in the mirror, the pitted lines of worry seemed to mar my face, reflecting my inner turmoil. Should I steal the cup or lose my best friend?

Chapter 2: The Betrayal

“Frankie...wait! Frankie...I don’t understand...please...”

Turning to face me, I could see that my final plea had affected her, although she refused to look me in the eye. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, “I really am, but there is nothing I can do.” Frankie’s bottom lip seemed to quiver as she spoke. “I...I...explained everything in the note. I’ve got to go.” Wiping back the tears with the sleeve of her cardigan, I could see the pain that was eating her up from inside. Slowly, she looked up, shook her head, then turned and ran.

I looked at the note that was now crumpled up in my hand. Had she really meant it? Gazing in disbelief at the words on the page, a solitary tear fell and

exploded upon the page.

***You're. not one of us. Leave us alone.
You are not wanted here.***

Watching Frankie run across the playground in tears, I knew that she had followed my orders. Lydia seemed to be frozen in disbelief, lost in her own pathetic self-pity, her confidence slowly evaporating. Part of me wanted to see her collapse in a heap on the tarmac, to hit rock bottom. However, I had worked too hard to miss this opportunity; she was vulnerable, and it was time to strike.

Brrriiiiiinnngggg! The shrill of the school bell silenced the playground, bringing all activity to an immediate halt. Screwing the note into a tight ball, I flung it into the bin and trudged back towards class.

“Hey Lydia, wait up!”

Anne’s words caught me off guard. I was certain that she was the reason Frankie had written the note – who else could be so cruel?

“I want to show you something, come with me.”

Grabbing my arm, Anne hauled me through the double doors and marched me across the empty gym to the school trophy cabinet.

“See that? The big one? Steal it and you’re in.”

Her tone was calm yet firm and somewhat menacing - I knew she wasn’t joking. Eye-balling the trophy, floods of worry began to surge through me, instantly making me feel nauseous.

“I can’t...” I muttered, the words burning my throat as they forced their way out.

“Yes, you can. You can, or you can kiss goodbye to Frankie, and you can kiss goodbye to ever being anything in Tarwich. It’s up to you.” With that, Anne swept out of the room, slamming the doors behind her.

Chapter 3: The Dilemma Revisited

Staring at my reflection in the mirror, the pitted lines of worry seemed to mar my face, reflecting my inner turmoil. Should I steal the cup or lose my best friend? Confronted by the impossible choice, I reached out to my only true friend...

Dear Diary,

Today has been the worst day of my life! I don't know what to do. Is it wrong to steal if I intend to give it back? I only need to prove to that cow Anne Riley that I am brave enough to do it, then she will get off my back. She is such a nasty piece of work! But if I don't do it, I will lose Frankie forever. I don't know what she sees in Anne, but she is so manipulated by her – it's ridiculous. If I get accepted into The Cosmics, I can get her to see things from my perspective – I can save her. So, does that make stealing the cup acceptable? Please help me make the right decision. Xx L

Chapter 4: The Vision

Prizing open the janitor's door, I tentatively enter the school that lies deathly still, enveloped in darkness. An icy blast of air rushes in, suppressing any last warmth I feel inside. Tiptoeing along the maze of corridors, I can hear voices plaguing my thoughts: "Thief! Coward! Loser!" but determination spurs me on. I silently slide from room to room, in pursuit of my only goal – the trophy. Arriving at my destination, panic sets in. Questions begin to uncontrollably spiral inside my mind – questions that I thought I had answered. My heart is pounding like a machine gun, sending palpitations through my body; beads of sweat roll off my forehead; my breath quickens. Then silence. Contemplation. Action.

Grabbing the trophy, I turn and run, ignoring the deafening sirens that have engulfed the building. Screams of hatred chase after me, hunting me like a rabid animal. The corridors are now claustrophobic, glaring at me with condescending eyes. Bursting through the doors, I stream into the night, a thief on the run.

Chapter 5: The Reality

"Lydia, get up! We're going to be late for school!" My brother's words hauled me out from my nightmare. Sitting up in bed, I scanned the room for any traces of the heist – nothing. A relieved smile spread across my face.

Entering the playground, I had no idea of the fate that lay before me. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Anne with her precious Cosmics, laughing and fooling about. I was unsure why I ever wanted to be part of their gang as the mere sight of them now repulsed me. But it was never about Anne: it was always about Frankie. Frankie had been my best friend since I had arrived, and I was not going to give her up without a fight.

Gazing back over at the giggling hyenas, I realised that Frankie was not with them. But where was she? Frankie was never late. Another wave of anxiety rushed over me – what had happened to her? What had Anne done?

A gentle tap on my shoulder snapped out of my world of insecurity. Turning to face Frankie, I saw that once again, she was unable to look at me in the eye. Slowly, she reached into her pocket and withdrew a small piece of paper that had been carefully folded and handed it to me. As I opened the paper, I noticed her feet, nervously shuffling. At the sight of the words, my eyes filled with tears. I flung my arms around Frankie and gave her a hug she would remember. "Of course I forgive you," I sobbed, "you're my best friend."

The Teaching Sequence: The Independent Application stage

10) Independent Application

The final stage is where the pupils independently plan, draft and edit a new story of their own, drawing on all of the short-burst writing, poetry, rich reading and story writing they have been immersed in. Because the entire unit of work revolved around the needs of the class, identified from the initial 'cold task', the written outcomes all showed significant improvement. All the pupils demonstrated more confidence in applying the action toolkit within a story, many manipulating the tools for a desired effect on the reader. The following is an example of a pupil's independent story, using *Wolf Brother* as the inspiration for their writing. In this instance, the pupil chose to take on the additional challenge of writing in the style of her favourite author, Michelle Paver.

Wolf Brother by *Connie Horgan*

For a whole moon, we've been feasting on salmon. The herds of boar have migrated further South, leaving the Open Forest with hardly any prey. Fin-kedinn chose me to hunt for the clan, but even with my tracking skills, I've failed. Renn has tried to help, but the crunch of thick snow underfoot tells the Woodgrouse they're being hunted. So, they fly away. I remember the anger in Aki's voice: "Well done, Torak. I guess we'll have to starve thanks to your failure." I wish the boar would return.

Through the dense vegetation, the wind carries the scent of Forest-pig. In the Up, the wrath of the Sky-bear eats up the warm, bright Eye. My howl echoes in the darkness, bouncing off the trees, telling the forest that I'm hunting. The Thunderer throws his spears of light at the forest; as they feed on my surroundings, they turn into fire. Perfect. The crackle of flames and the applaud of the Thunderer will mask my scent as I tense my muscles, ready to pounce on the unsuspecting Forest-pig that has trotted into my cunning trap. My cubs shall feed like the Sky-bear tonight, because a Wolf shows no mercy...

Whoop! The alarm calls of a thousand monkeys pulled me out of my daydream. I jumped up, narrowly missing the flames that danced fluidly around me, blocking any escape route. "Think, Torak. Think!" A single vine hung from the treetops. I tore off my boots, flung them over my shoulder and began to climb, swallowing lungfuls of smoke as fear choked me. My fist clenched around my Clan-guardian feathers. Surely they'd protect me, wouldn't they?

Then, almost as abruptly as it had begun, the storm stopped. A shadow flew across the forest, leaving the land steaming and wet. A wave of relief washed over me. My eyes latched with the Wrens': 'Get ready. It is coming.'

As I shimmied down the tree-trunk, the foliage shook wildly. A deafening squeal pierced my soul. Thank the Spirit! It was a boar – but unlike any I'd seen. It exploded from the undergrowth, nostrils flaring: cries of terror tore through the forest. The whites of its eyes were bloodshot and lined with puss. They darted around, searching for an exit that wasn't there. Foam bubbled on its lips; ivory hooves threw week-old saplings at the sky; deadly tusks protruded from a gaping mouth. Its power flung me to the ground. I scrambled to my feet; I couldn't miss this chance! We couldn't survive much longer. I equipped my bow, drew my arm back and fired.

Even though the boar lay dead, joy soon dissipated into realisation. Realisation that the kill was not mine to take. A lone wolf entered the clearing. My arms trembled with fear. My heart pounded in my chest like a bass drum. His eyes suddenly flickered to life: two ebony flames that ate away at my heart. I couldn't outrun a wolf – I shouldn't even try. But he was padding closer, almost as if he knew I could escape...

He shot my Forest-pig. The little wretch did it on purpose so I couldn't toy with it. So much for my cubs feeding like the Sky-bear tonight - I was going to give them a live Forest-pig so they could rip its limbs off and hear its sequel in pain. But the boy ruined it. The boy made me fail. Now he would pay.

Our eyes locked over the Boar carcass. I shouldered my bow, ready to sprint. I tensed. The wolf unsheathed its claws. The chase was on.

Most people ask what happened next. I wish I could tell you, but only the Thunderer – perhaps even the World Spirit – saw what became of me. Although I was blinded and shrouded in darkness, I could still hear the crunch of snow under foot. I could still feel the hot, meaty breath of the wolf on my ankles. I could still hear that blood-curdling howl that reverberated in my mind. I could still survive...

Torak darted like a minnow through the waving trees. His lungs were heaving - in, out, in, out. His heart was pounding - boom-boom, boom-boom. He was sweating: his forehead and brow perspiring as his legs pushed him on. He wasn't paying attention; the Trees have never had their eternal meeting interrupted before. The Great Yew sighed. Oak glowered at Torak as he shot past. Willow whipped him with her long boughs, as I whipped them with my spears of lightning.

The wolf was gaining on him. Foolish mortal; why should I help him? I had given him a chance to save his clan but he hadn't taken it. Now he was trying to outrun a wolf. He was more stupid than I thought. I, the Thunderer, rule the skies. I summoned the storm that melted the snow. I forced the sun behind my swirling mass of darkness and rain. I would never try to outrun a

wolf – not that I couldn't; I'd beat a wolf any day. But a human couldn't. Torak couldn't. He would fail...

I could see the camp. I could see...the...camp! I had made it...I was going to live! Unable to go any further, my legs gave way beneath me. I felt sick. I arched my back and wretched. Suddenly, a wave of shock flooded over me, a realisation that I couldn't rest until I was safely in my tent – the wolf was still after me. Expecting to feel the fiery pain of fangs sinking into my flesh, I rolled over. The forest loomed over me. My pursuer was gone.



Jamie currently leads all elements of Talk for Writing and Talk for Reading training and is available for inset, consultancy and individual school support. He is passionate about supporting schools and individuals in their own implementation, developing the systems, practices and culture that leads to sustainable improvement. He is also an advocate for the success Talk for Writing has in Year 6, promoting 'Greater Depth' writers and lifelong lovers of English.

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This unit of work is also featured in *Transforming learning across the curriculum* by Julia Strong and Pie Corbett.

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