

Creative Writing - Separate the steps

To quieten concerns about inaccurate writing, and about the children forgetting their hard-learned spelling and grammar rules in the excitement of concentrating on new ideas, keep the areas separate.

1. Get excited and think of ideas
2. Get some basic structure and order - make a story plan / explosion diagram / think plan ...
3. Create a draft (individually or in pairs/groups)
4. Check and correct grammar
5. Check and correct spelling
6. Write and decorate in presentable format - for wall display, or little book, or class compilation, or PowerPoint display, or dramatize, or ... (many possibilities)
7. Children share with other children (display stories)
8. Children enjoy each other's stories and give good feedback and get excited about their next story.

OK, let's look at each of these steps ...

Step 1. Get excited and think of ideas

There are so many possible stimuli to get children started with thinking about and getting excited about a topic.

- All of the topics in the **Listening and Speaking** and **Reading** modules can lead to a good creative writing 'spark'.
- The text book topics especially give good ideas (and vocabulary) for the 'characters' and the 'setting' for their stories.

But obviously it is likely to take a little more than that. So ...

Give the children **experiences** that they will be eager to share about. Involve their **senses**.

For example:

- Watch a movie
- Listen to some music
- Look at photo's / pictures from the Internet
- Taste / eat some food
- Tell them a story / read them a story
- Play a physical game
- Play a guessing game with things they can feel but not see inside a bag
- Play a guessing game with smells
- Play a 'what if...?' game
- Let them think about their wishes, dreams

It is educationally sound to encourage children to fantasize – it improves their development.

The teacher (and/or parents) may have a moral or religious objection to children exploring topics such as ghosts, as some believe these to be both real and evil (and you don't want the children going home frightened). However, without getting into that particular area, children can imagine all sorts of supernatural possibilities. Wishes that come true, super powers, amazing creatures, impossibilities that become possible ... and if it is too disturbing, it can all turn out to be a dream at the end.

There is no limit on imagination! Here are some starting ideas:

Starting with an image

Give the children a printed picture – there are lots of possible images available on Google Images.

- Ask the children to add to the picture – draw in character(s) real or imaginary.
- Make a story about the picture.
- Tell other children about their picture story.

For an example see the pictures below.

Starting with a story

'*Fractured Fairy Tales*' are a popular way to grow children's thinking and imagination. Basically you start with a well-known fairy tale or traditional story and say 'What if ...?'

- what if there was something different about the character(s)
- what if it took place in a different setting
- what if there was a different ending

The teacher should tell and retell the story, and the creative activity could also start with a picture.

(There are lots of ideas and example of *Fractured Fairy Tales* on the Internet.)

Starting with some food

Imagine what the food could do – make you bigger, stronger, smarter, able to fly, able to hear people's thoughts ...

Imagine how the food was made, where did it come from, was this something from another planet and it fell into the kitchen ...

Come on! So many possibilities!

Starting with a guessing game

Put something 'gross' inside a (not see-through) bag. For example, create some 'slime' using cornflour (*yes, look it up on the Internet!*).

Children put in their hands and feel it, and guess what impossible thing it could be ...

Step 2. Get some basic structure and order - make a story plan / explosion diagram / think plan ...

There are many ways to plan how a creative writing piece will go. At this stage the grammar and spelling don't matter, it's all about the ideas. Children can start to organise their thoughts using a graphic organiser, or explosion chart, or ideas web - whatever works - and using words, symbols or pictures to record the ideas.

Here is an example of a simple **Story Map**. The children need to think (in a very simple way) about their character(s), the setting, and a simple sequence of plot with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Break it down a little more - work on the individual elements:

a) Character(s)

Children can have a lot of fun creating or describing their character(s). This can be done visually as children draw or model (play dough for example). Here is an idea for a character map - remember it can all be done with pictures or symbols rather than words.

b) Setting

Children should think about where and when their story is happening. It's a good idea for them to think about places and times they are less familiar with. Clearly this could best be represented by drawing a picture. Here is a possible plan for the setting.

c) Problem and Solution

This is the basic idea behind any story, and the children should be at least vaguely aware of it.

However, it may not necessarily be something you need to teach as such.

The children could simply depict (drawing a picture or symbol) what the situation is at the beginning of the story, and how it is at the end.

Step 3. Create a draft (individually or in pairs/groups)

Now it is time to start putting words down - **without worrying about spelling and grammar!**

The children should at this stage have some ideas - in the form of pictures and symbols.

So what about the words that the children don't know - won't it be really frustrating for them?

Children in Australian schools commonly use a "**Have a Go**" pad or notebook. When they want to write a word that they are unsure of, they 'have a go' - using their phonics skills - and write it in their notebook. They then take the book to the teacher, and she corrects it for them. Then when they come to put the word in their story, hopefully they will remember it in future - or the next time they need it they will notice it in their book.

Using 'English Only'

Hopefully you are teaching in 'English Only', encouraging the children to think in English rather than constantly having to translate, and associating new English words with a picture, action or other English words rather than the BM equivalent. If children know that you are going to give them the BM they won't even listen to the English because they are just waiting for the translation.

However, for this activity when they are attempting to think of a word which may be completely

unknown to them they could draw a picture or symbol and then maybe write the BM word (if they know it) rather than have them unable to express themselves about something they are keen to say.

The left-hand column could include these ideas, with the teacher supplying the correctly spelled word on the right. This could become like their personal dictionary of words they are learning and using.

Step 4. Check and correct grammar

The children are not writing long stories at this stage - you might expect 3 sentences (beginning, middle, end). First ask the children to focus on their own story.

- Focus especially or firstly on any grammar items that you have recently taught them about. For example, ask them to look at the verb(s), notice the tense (have they been taught about simple past yet?)
- ask them to check any pronouns they have used.
- ask them to notice any nouns - are they plural or singular?
- etc.

Then (*while the children are working quietly*) the teacher can go and look at each one individually.

Step 5. Check and correct spelling

Just like with the grammar, ask them first of all to check any words that have arisen in recent vocabulary practice, and the words that they have hopefully copied correctly from their 'have a go' books.

Ask the children to check their own words, then each other's, and then the teacher can check them too. Incorrect words could be written into their 'have a go' books and corrected there.

Step 6. Write and decorate in presentable format - for wall display, or little book, or class compilation, or PowerPoint display, or dramatize, or ... (many possibilities)

There is room for lots of variety and creativity at this stage. The children could present their writing in many different formats

- On 'Mahjong' paper on the wall or pin-up board
- On the white/black-board
- In a [little book](#) (*click on the link*)
- As a page in a class book - staple everyone's stories together
- As an LCD presentation (scan/photograph and insert into PowerPoint file)
- As a Movie (scan/photograph and use [MovieMaker](#))
- As a play presented for other classes
- ...

And many other possibilities.

Step 7. Children share with other children (display stories)

Depending on the format, the stories can be shared with classmates, other classes, the rest of the school, parents ...

Step 8. Children enjoy each other's stories and give good feedback and get excited about their next story.

Do not miss this step! Encourage the children, and let them encourage each other, so that they will be eager to go on to bigger and better projects. Hopefully they experienced some fun 'surprise' in the initial presentation of the topic, they responded to the challenge to create something, and now it is time to make sure they are rewarded.