

You Can... Stretch children's imagination

Children can learn from their reading that there are no limits to a writer's imagination. Applying this to their own writing opens all sorts of exciting possibilities for the imaginative child. Children with less imagination may need a little more persuasion to 'let go' and enjoy writing a fantasy story.

Thinking points

- It is often said of prolific writers, with a strongly identifiable style, that they only have one plot and their characters are always the same. Their stories may be formulaic, but they still work well as the details of place and character and setting are different every time.
- *First, Then, Next, Lastly...* sums up the stages of a simple story. It also offers a ratio for introduction, middle and end – useful for infant story writers.
- Introducing fantasy elements into a story forces the imagination to stretch, so even an everyday setting can become fantastic and extraordinary.
- Sometimes it's good to work together as a class or in a group until children's confidence builds up and they are ready to attempt writing on their own.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Themes occur again and again in stories from different sources and different authors. How many story characters can you think who are gullible or unprotected and are tricked by someone mean or mischievous? Cinderella; Snow White; Little Red Riding Hood, to name but a few! Usually, revenge and/or championing of the innocent is the outcome.
- Practise simple deconstruction of familiar stories with the children to determine the three components of a story: setting, character(s) and plot. For example:
 - Setting – two cottages at either side of a forest
 - Characters – main characters: Little Red Riding Hood, Wolf; other characters essential to the plot: Woodcutter (Dad), Grandma; lesser character: Mum
 - Plot: Girl sets out on errand for Mum to deliver cake to Grandma; warned not to stop and to speak to strangers; girl disobeys warning – picks flowers and talks to wolf. On arrival at Grandma's, girl is fooled into thinking wolf in disguise is Grandma – almost gets eaten alive. Dad comes to rescue with axe and Grandma is found locked in cupboard in her vest!



- Ask the children to think of all the different settings they can from the real world and then add any made-up places and worlds – these are beyond counting. The number of different potential characters is equally infinite, especially if one counts animals acting like humans, and inanimate objects coming to life. The variation of plot is also infinite – although themes will occur again and again, the details will differ.
- Give the children dice and copies of photocopiable page 59 to come up with components for a story. Allow them to work in pairs to plan how one character will trick another and how the fooled character will win through with the help of a third.