

Story Reading into Writing

Below is an extract of *'Story Reading into Writing'* by Pie Corbett. Corbett is an educational trainer and author, who has developed an approach to writing, which is widely used across UK primary schools, including here at Redhill Primary Academy. We feel that this part of the extract is essential for you to read as it outlines the importance of our children becoming proficient readers inspired by books, which, in turn, enables them to become excellent writers.

You can read the entire article at

<https://www.talk4writing.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Story-Reading-into-Writing.pdf>

Children who read plenty of memorable stories avidly and repetitively, or are read a regular 'bedtime story', will implicitly internalise language patterns. Many of these children have the skill to draw on this resource for their own writing. Traditional tales are significant because they loiter in the mind powerfully due to their rhythmic, repetitive language but also because of their powerful images - wolves and trolls tend to hang around!

Internalising language and ideas by drawing on reading really supports children make connections to their writing. Many writers advice to young writers is inevitably, 'If you want to write then read, read, read'. Reading with writing in mind can help to deepen understanding of how language has been crafted to create different effects.

The idea that 'reading as a writer' becomes a form of copying and therefore 'cheating' may be a barrier for some children. In fact, the imitating of sentence patterns gradually adds to the child's linguistic store and later on they often use similar patterns and approaches in their own ways. For instance, a young child might reuse an opening sentence borrowed directly from a telling of 'The Little Red Hen' such as, 'Once upon a time there was a Little Red Hen who lived on a farm'. Later in their writing the syntactical pattern may reappear, 'Once upon a time there was a boy called Frostie who lived by a cave'. This ability to internalise patterns and use them to create new utterances is how

language develops. It is often referred to as 'generative grammar' - which is the child's ability to work out the underlying grammatical patterns of a language and then use them to create new utterances. This only happens when a child understands the meaning of what is being said so time spent on deepening understanding and appreciation of texts is crucial if the reading is to influence the writing. Instinctively, Maisie, 10 years, knows that the meaning

matters when she says, *'When I am reading and don't understand a word, I check what it means. We got told to try and put tricky words into a new sentence, then we will remember it and what it means. Once we know it we can always use it.'*

The sort of attentive reading that consciously looks at the crafting of writing can help children see how other writers have handled narrative. It is especially useful when considering something difficult that a child would like to attempt.

Of course such 'attentive' reading also helps the reader to internalise the patterns. Where the writing is especially effective, it may also trigger the imagination. It acts like a catalyst. Good writing makes you want to write yourself and provides an imaginative store of possibilities that can be drawn upon and extended. As Hursley Moss, 9 years, says, *'If I'm writing about dragons or mythical creatures, I use my imagination. But, if I was writing about a fugitive or someone being shot at, I'd get my inspiration from Anthony Horowitz "Alex Rider stories".'* Children who read deeply and attentively live within the imagined world of a story. When they write, this can be drawn upon and creatively manipulated - providing the young reader with a sort of living library of characters, places, events and writing ideas. So, deep reading feeds the imaginative storehouse. Alexander is aware of the influence of his reading, *'When I am writing, I sometimes use phrases and wonderful words from books and also from the word board. It helps me to know what to do in writing. Books by Lemony Snicket are full of good phrases and words to use in any writing.'* Obviously, his class have benefited from gathering words and phrases onto a 'word board'. In the same class, Zak not only uses his reading but also involves his 'talk partner' in discussing possible choices, *'When I am writing, I sometimes use the ideas that I have read in books. They give me strong words or even openers. Sometimes I get my ideas from my Talk Partner because they might know better words.'* Callum is aware of recycling his vocabulary in different stories and knows that every take does not have to be totally new, *'When I am writing, I sometimes use strange words and phrases that I have remembered from different books. I also use WOW words that I have used before and I pinch words from my Talk Partner.'*

In schools, we begin by reading for pleasure, to feed the imagination - and then to move on and read more deeply, to dig away at the meaning and deepen understanding. Once that is done - once the story has been discussed, acted, painted... then there may be space to move on and consider the words from a writer's angle... both what makes something effective or what makes something a weak piece of writing. It is worth remembering that it is easier to spot other people's weaknesses than our own because we are reading as a reader rather than as the writer. Of course, it is more obvious in music when a musician plays a wrong note. Bum notes are easy to notice. Looking at poor examples can help a writer think about what is needed to communicate more powerfully.

When writers in a class read together as writers, they begin to look carefully, reading more slowly than before, trying to notice what works. How was this magic 3 constructed? The class discuss what works and then move on to trying it out for themselves. In this way, stylistic features can be constantly noticed, referred to, discussed, collected and then imitated until they become an automatic part of the class's repertoire. In the end, this sort of curiosity becomes a habit that children apply when they are reading independently.