Year 5 writing activity
Using dialogue in a mystery story

This activity uses an extract from The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat by Enid Blyton.

The text analysis will get children working on plot development, character description, dialogue, paragraphs and cohesion.

The activity includes:
• Photocopiable text
• Comprehension activity to support close reading of the text
• Guidance on how to guide the class in analyzing the text structure and languages
• Support and resources to plan retelling events from a different character’s viewpoint
• Support for writing
• Support for improving, editing, reviewing and sharing the writing
• Activity moderating grid

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www.risingstars-uk.com/writing
The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat
Enid Blyton

Fatty (who was called Fatty because his initials were F-A-T, for Frederick Algernon Trotteville), Larry, Daisy, Pip and Bets are the Five Find-Outers. They were accidentally at the scene of a crime when the safe at a theatre was robbed and a man called Boysie, who played the Cat in the pantomime, was arrested for the crime. But the Five Find-Outers didn’t think he was guilty and were determined to find out what had really happened. Towards the end of the book, Fatty sums up what they have found.

“And as it happens, it wasn’t Boysie!” said Fatty, triumphantly. “Let me tell you what I think happened last night, now that Bets has opened my eyes.”

“Yes, go on, tell us,” said Pip, getting excited as he too began to see what Fatty was getting at.

“Well – the theatre cast all departed, as we know, at half past five, because we saw them go,” said Fatty. “Only Boysie was left, because he lives there, and the manager was upstairs in his office.
“Now, there was a member of the cast who had a grudge against the manager, and wanted to pay him back. So that night, after we had gone home from our planting of false clues, this person came silently back – let himself in secretly, because Boysie didn’t see him or he would have said so – and hid till he saw Boysie making the tea. He knew that Boysie always made tea and took a cup to the manager.

“Very well. Boysie made the tea, and poured himself out a cup. He didn’t drink it because it was too hot. He waited till it was cooler. And the hidden person slipped out, and put a sleeping-draught into Boysie’s cup.

“Boysie drank it, felt terribly sleepy, went into the veranda room and snored by the fire. The hidden person then made sure that Boysie wouldn’t wake up – and he stripped the cat-skin off Boysie …”

“And put it on himself!” cried all the others together. “Oh Fatty!”

“Yes – he put it on himself. And made a cup of tea for the manager, putting into it a sleeping-draught, of course – and up the stairs he went! Well, how could the manager guess it was anyone but Boysie in his pantomime cat-skin! Wouldn’t anyone think that?”

“Of course,” said Daisy. “And then he waited till the manager had drunk his tea and fallen asleep – and did the robbery!”

“Exactly,” said Fatty. “Took down the mirror, found the key in the manager’s wallet, worked out the combination that would open the safe – and stole everything in it. Then he went down to the sleeping Boysie and pulled him into the skin again – and departed as secretly as he came, with the money!

“He knew that when the manager’s cup of tea was examined and traces of a sleeping-draught were found, the first question asked would be, ‘Who brought up the cup of tea to the manager?’” said Fatty. “And the answer to that – quite untruly as it happens – was, of course, Boysie.”

“Oh Fatty – it’s wonderful,” said Bets, her face shining. “We’ve solved the mystery!”

“We haven’t,” said Larry and Pip together.

“We have,” said Bets indignantly.

“Ahh, wait a minute, Bets,” said Fatty. “We know how the thing was done – but the real mystery now is – who was inside the skin of the pantomime cat?”
Unit 1: The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat

1. Who was left in the theatre when the cast departed?

2. Who said:
   “Now, there was a member of the cast who had a grudge against the manager, and wanted to pay him back.”?

3. “And the hidden person slipped out, and put a sleeping draught into Boysie’s cup.”
   In this sentence, tick one word that draught is closest to in meaning.
   - drink
   - gentle breeze
   - potion
   - suggestion

4. How did the hidden person make sure that Boysie was blamed for the theft?

5. Find and copy the words that tell you the one piece of information that the Find-Outers still need to uncover by the end of this extract.

6. Number these events 1–4 in the order in which they occurred.
   - Someone put a sleeping draught in the manager’s tea.
   - Someone stole everything from inside the safe.
   - Someone other than Boysie put on the cat costume.
   - Someone put a sleeping draught in Boysie’s tea.
Unit 1 Using dialogue in a mystery story

In this unit children will:
• read from model text *The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat* by Enid Blyton
• identify expectations of characters, settings and plot in a mystery story
• consider the impact of sentence length at different points in the story
• explore the function of dialogue in developing the narrative
• plan, draft, edit and improve a conclusion to the story, using dialogue to move the plot forwards.

Stage 1: Responding to the text

Activities:
• Establish prior knowledge. Clarify children’s expectations of a mystery story:
  o Who has read one or seen one on screen?
  o What makes the story a mystery story?
  • Think about character, setting, plot. What do children expect from each of these in a mystery?
    (E.g. characters that may not be who they seem to be; detailed plot; setting that may be a bit gloomy or scary.)
  o Make a list of words and phrases children use to characterise this genre.
    • Does it have to be scary or dangerous?
• Establish prior knowledge about Enid Blyton, an English children's writer who lived from 1897–1968. Do any of the children know any of her creations, e.g. *The Famous Five; The Secret Seven; Noddy; The Magic Faraway Tree*? Invite them to discuss their experiences of her books.
• Before reading the story ensure the children understand the meaning of any unusual vocabulary, e.g. “combination”, “departed”, “manager”, “sleeping-draught”, “veranda”, and “indignantly”. Help the children remember the meanings of these words by putting them in contextualising sentences, e.g. *The combination of numbers needed to open the safe was 2, 13, 24, 6.)*
• Read and talk about the text.
  o This story was written in 1949. Is there any evidence that this story was written around 70 years ago? (E.g. *The safe has no digital key; interjections such as “Very well” and “Oh Fatty”.*)
• Ask the children to answer the reading comprehension questions to ensure close reading of the text and good understanding.
• Together, share answers to the questions and discuss the strategies children used to answer them.
Stage 2: Analysing the text content

Activities:
- Ask children to read the text aloud to a response partner to revisit the text, develop fluency, ensure accurate pronunciation of all words and to practise reading with expression and a reasonable speaking pace.
- Ask the children to underline any new words/phrases. Take feedback and explain what these mean in context.

Discussing genre
- Think, pair, share: Ask pairs to revisit the list of expectations the class had of mystery stories.
  - Which of the features of a mystery story they identified does this story have (bearing in mind that it’s an extract)? (E.g. The story has: an unexplained or hidden event; a character who is not as they seem; a detailed plot which involves a crime; a slightly sinister setting of an empty theatre; ‘detectives’ trying to find out what happened; a simple explanation which turns out to be wrong; plot driving it more than setting or character.) Encourage the children to use evidence from the text to support their answers.
  - Which additional attributes are not evidenced in this extract but may be elsewhere in the book? (E.g. a solution to the mystery.)
  - Which additional attributes do each pair think are vital in a mystery story?

Discussing plot development
- In groups, ask children to draw a large circle on a sheet of paper. Inside the circle, they should make notes to summarise the events we know about in the story so far (e.g. cast left at 5:30 p.m.; Boysie made tea, etc.).
- Model making a note that shows what the Find-Outers may have done to collect a piece of evidence. Show the children your thinking as you make connections with the text and what you know about other detective stories.
- In their groups, ask children to make notes around the outside of the circle to consider what the Find-Outers may have done to collect the information they have. Ask them to be adventurous, using ideas they have read of or seen in mystery stories (e.g. talked to cast member to find alibis; talked to other people to corroborate alibis; snooped around; followed people; listened to phone taps, etc.). You will need to decide whether you will accept modern-day, anachronistic suggestions (e.g. checked mobile phone usage; tracked people using GPS).
- Take feedback from the groups and give them a chance to share their ideas.

Discussing characters
- Point out that this extract is told almost entirely through dialogue.
- Check that children know what adjectives, adverbs and phrases are. Model jotting down some words that tell us about Fatty in the opening few paragraphs. Briefly, ask different groups of children to jot down some adjectives, adverbs and phrases to describe what we know about each of the characters individually.
- Discuss how we know what we know about characters from this extract and ask the children to give evidence for their opinions, e.g:
  - Fatty is clever, logical, triumphant, confident – he put the clues together.
  - Pip is excited, logical, a good listener, clever – he worked out the problem with the answer.
  - Daisy is logical, a good listener, clever – she followed Fatty’s narrative and saw the connections.
  - Larry is a good listener, quieter, clever – he doesn’t speak until Bets says they’ve solved the problem, but he knows they haven’t.
  - Bets listens well and is enthusiastic but needs help to make the connections.
• Discuss the author’s options – instead of writing these events as dialogue, how else could she have summarised what the characters have found out? (E.g. A character could have written a letter, diary, notes on a flipchart, or the author could simply have summarised the points for the reader.) Would these methods give the same effect as the dialogue? Would they feel as immediate? (E.g. A diary would not necessarily include all the other character’s ideas.)

• Talk about why the author might have chosen to use dialogue at this point in the story. What additional information does that give us? (E.g. Information about the characters; opportunity to break up a lengthy narrative; opportunity to emphasise key plot points.)

Stage 3: Analysing the text structure and language

Activities:

Talking about sentences

• In groups, ask children to use the enlarged copy of the text and:
  o underline interjections (e.g. “oh”, “yes”, “very well”) and simple sentences in one colour
  o underline sentences with two clauses in another colour
  o underline longer sentences (i.e. multi-clause sentences/ more than two clauses) in a different colour.

• Discuss where in the text these different lengths of sentences are. (E.g. The longer sentences are in Fatty’s retelling of the events in the story. The shorter sentences are either Fatty underlining key plot points or the other children’s contributions – which also underline key plot points.)

• Ask the children to consider the impact of these different sentence types. What job are these sentences doing in the story? (E.g. Longer sentences can include a concise list of actions and move the story along swiftly, e.g. “Boysie drank it, felt terribly sleepy, went into the veranda room and snored by the fire”; sudden shorter sentences break the flow of the narrative and draw attention to key plot points, e.g. “He didn’t drink it because it was too hot. He waited till it was cooler. And the hidden person …”)}

Talking about dialogue and its punctuation

• Ask children to reread the text in groups of five. In each group, one child should read the words of a different child. Let children take turns in reading the different roles.
  o Ask children how they knew the appropriate intonation to use each time they read. Ask them to circle some of the verbs and adverbials used in the dialogue to describe how people spoke (e.g. “said … triumphantly”; “said, getting excited”, etc.).
  o Discuss other ways the author uses to support reading aloud, e.g:
    • interjections such as “Oh Fatty!”
    • exclamation marks.

• Ask children to highlight all inverted commas.
  o What do they notice about paragraphs within a speaker’s turn in dialogue? (E.g. Opening inverted commas to begin the paragraph, but not closing inverted commas to finish the previous one.)
  o Which punctuation marks are inside the inverted commas? (“!” and “?” as well as ‘end of a speaker’s turn’ full stops and other punctuation such as ellipses “...”)
  o When are full stops inside inverted commas? (At the end of a speaker’s turn.)

• Discuss the impact of the punctuation in helping the reader to understand how to read a text.
Talking about punctuation

• Model finding a few of the different uses of the comma in the text. Ensure the children understand that parenthesis is information additional to the sentence; it can be omitted and the sentence still makes sense.

• Let children work in pairs: one should read the text aloud as the other highlights all commas.

  o Ask children to make a tally chart to record all the different uses of commas they observe. This might include:
    • separating items in lists (e.g. "Took down the mirror, found the key in the manager’s wallet, worked out the combination that would open the safe – and stole everything in it.")
    • linked to inverted commas (e.g. "Of course," said Daisy.)
    • following a fronted adverb/adverbial (e.g. "Now, there was a member of the cast")
    • marking parenthesis (e.g. "the theatre cast all departed, as we know, at half past five")

• Ask children to highlight and discuss all examples of:

  o ellipses (e.g. "he stripped the cat-skin off Boysie …")
  o parentheses except when marked by commas (e.g. "this person came silently back – let himself in secretly, because Boysie didn’t see him or he would have said so – and hid till he saw … ")

• Talk too about other uses of dashes:

  o after interjections (e.g. "Yes – he put it on himself")
  o marking excitement (e.g. "open the safe – and stole everything in it")

Stage 4: Planning to write: Using dialogue in a mystery story

Activities:

• Explain that you want the children to continue and complete the story of The Mystery of the Pantomime Cat.

• Ask children to work in groups and divide their large sheet of paper into four equal sections. They should use each section to make notes exploring a different way of continuing the story (e.g. Find-Outers talking through the clues they have and working out who was wearing the cat-skin; Find-Outers setting a trap for the cat-skin wearer; Find-Outers deciding to share their discoveries with adults/police; or Find-outers deciding to do more finding out and detecting).

• Once they have four ideas, ask the group to discuss what might happen next as a result of each of the actions.

• Decide on one idea to model with the children. Choose one of the methods below such as freeze-frame to help you consider what will happen in your story. Model your note-taking, checking that your plot makes sense.

• The groups should then decide on one idea to explore at greater length, considering how the action will continue until the end of the story. Remind them that they only have about 500 words (approximately the length of the extract). Give them a choice as to whether to explore how the story should continue using:

  o role-play
  o a different drama technique such as freeze-frame or conscience alley
  o drawing.

• Let a representative of each group explain their ideas to the class.

• Distribute the writing framework.

Resources needed:

Shared copy of the text (PDF/IWB/visualiser)

The success criteria

Each group needs:

• large paper and marker pens

Each child needs:

• the copy of the text they have previously highlighted and annotated

• the writing framework from page 15 (some children may benefit from this being enlarged to A3).
• Give children quiet reflection time (possibly in pairs) for them individually to record notes on:
  o their chosen way of continuing the story
  o what the characters might do, think and feel.
• Look back at your notes and ask the children to give you feedback – does my story make sense, what could I add, is there anything that I don’t need?
• Ask children to share their ideas with a response partner. Ask the response partner to give feedback on whether the story makes sense.
• Give children the opportunity to ‘talk like a writer’ as they tell their version of the next part of the story, and to receive peer feedback.
• Ask the children to discuss what makes a successful mystery story and what should be included in dialogue.
• Modify the success criteria (online at My Rising Stars).

Stage 5: Writing

Activities:
• Remind children that the task is to continue the story about the Five Find-Outers and the pantomime cat.
• Model using your notes to write a paragraph of your story. Ensure you include dialogue, short sentences, multi-clause sentences and parentheses.
• Give children a few minutes to ‘talk like a writer’ and tell their partner the final part of their story as they plan to write it. If it helps, ask them to use a polite ‘writer’s voice’.
• Let response partners give some brief feedback before children swap roles.
• Read aloud the success criteria (online at My Rising Stars).
• Let the children write.
• Throughout the writing session, quietly let the children know how long they have spent, where in their story they should expect to be now and how long there is left.
• Five minutes before the end of the session, ask all children to stop writing and read their story aloud to themselves. If they find errors, or missing words or words they can improve, they should use this opportunity to make changes.

Stage 6: Improving, editing, reviewing and sharing the writing

Activities:
• Revisit together the success criteria (online at My Rising Stars).
• Model the process below using your work as an example. The children can give you feedback on each step of the process. After you model a step the children should have a go with their partner at editing their work.
• Ask children to reread their texts three times with their response partner:
  o First read through: Children read their partner’s text out loud to them. The child who wrote the text listens to check that their writing makes sense, listens out for obvious errors and checks the text follows their plan. Children then swap roles.

Resources needed:

Shared copy of the text (PDF/IWB/visualiser)
The success criteria
Each child needs:
• the copy of the text they have previously highlighted
• the completed writing framework.

Each child needs:
• the success criteria
• their writing/completed writing framework
• different coloured highlighters/pens/pencils.
Second read through: Children read their partner’s text and highlight the success criteria they have met. They suggest three places where their partner could improve their work (to achieve or further improve on the success criteria).

Third read through: Children proofread their partner’s text together with them. They check for errors in punctuation and spelling and correct these as necessary. You should give input at this stage if needed.

**Lessons from writing**

- Prior to the session, identify errors that were commonly made. Write sample sentences that need to be corrected and ask the children to help you to fix them. These could include:
  - layout and punctuation of dialogue, e.g:
    - *I don’t believe it! she said. Well he said I can prove it. Go on, then said Dan.*
    - Work together to explore how the text should be laid out and punctuated so it’s easy for the reader to know exactly who is speaking.
  - overuse of *said* in dialogue.
    - Use the same piece of dialogue as above. Discuss when to add an adverb and when there is a more precise verb that would improve the dialogue by telling us more about the character.

**Improving the writing**

- **After the texts have been marked**: give the children time to read through your comments, to look at the success criteria and to implement any changes suggested. This should not involve the children rewriting the entire story – just those parts that you would like them to revisit to practise/improve their writing.

**Share**

Sometimes, children write stories to practise writing stories. Other times, there is a planned reason or an audience. If you want children to share their writing:

- each child could recast their text as a playscript or as a diary
- they could make and keep audio recordings of their ideas.
Unit 1: Using dialogue in a mystery story

1. Find-Outers are behind the theatre at 5:30 p.m. when the cast leave.

2. Boysie makes tea.
   Hidden person puts sleeping draught in tea.
   Boysie falls asleep.
   Hidden person takes cat-skin off him.

3. Hidden person puts on cat-skin – takes tea to manager.
   Manager falls asleep.
   Hidden person empties safe.
   Hidden person puts cat-skin back on Boysie.

Additional clues the Find-Outers have uncovered about the hidden person:
- Boysie was small and the cat-skin was made to fit him.
- Four other cast members: two men and two women.
- There was a rip in the cat-skin the day after the theft.

What will the characters say, do, think and feel?

And what will happen as a result of their actions?

What will the Find-Outers do next?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working at greater depth within the expected standard</th>
<th>Working at the expected standard</th>
<th>Working towards the expected standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characterisation</strong> is consistent with the model text.</td>
<td>The narrative continues and concludes in an un rushed and satisfactory way.</td>
<td>The narrative continues on from the model text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphs are used consistently to organise ideas.</td>
<td>Paragrap hs are generally used to organise and present ideas sequentially.</td>
<td>Paragrap hs are sometimes used to organise ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns, adverbials and prepositional phrases are used appropriately to aid cohesion between sentences and paragraphs.</td>
<td>Pronouns and adverbials are used appropriately to aid cohesion between paragraphs.</td>
<td>At least three different conjunctions are used correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs, prepositional phrases and expanded noun phrases add detail and precision.</td>
<td>More precise vocabulary is used to create a character and setting.</td>
<td>Some precise and well-chosen words are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some parentheses are marked with commas, brackets or dashes.</td>
<td>Apostrophes are consistently used correctly.</td>
<td>Apostrophes are generally used accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogue is integrated to convey character and advance the action.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description of characters is shown through dialogue and other characters’ responses and reactions.</strong></td>
<td>The narrative follows the agreed plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wide range of clause structures is used, sometimes varying their position within the sentence.</td>
<td>A fronted adverbial at the beginning of paragraphs indicates a change of time or place.</td>
<td>Planned events are listed in sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronouns, adverbials and prepositional phrases are used appropriately to aid cohesion between sentences and paragraphs.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commas are used for clarity in multi-clause sentences.</strong></td>
<td><strong>End of sentence punctuation (.?) is generally accurate.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of characters is shown through dialogue and other characters’ responses and reactions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commas are used after fronted adverbial clauses.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spaces between letters and words allow for good legibility.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverbs, prepositional phrases and expanded noun phrases add detail and precision.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commas are used in lists.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Many words on the Year 5/6 word list – or words of equivalent challenge – are correctly spelled.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commas are used for clarity in multi-clause sentences.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commas are used in lists.</strong></td>
<td>Handwriting is fluent and legible. Parallel ascenders and descenders aid clarity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legibility, fluency and speed determine which letters are left unjoined.</strong></td>
<td><strong>In handwriting, most letters are appropriately joined.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spelling of all taught words is largely correct.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The narrative includes insights into what the characters say, do, think and feel.</strong></td>
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