

Writing narrative

National Literacy Strategy

Writing Flier 2 This flier covers the main points relating to writing narrative, helping children to build up a repertoire of different types of narrative.

Narrative in the NLS

Story writing is included in the NLS *Framework* in every term, as a central aspect of literacy. Story writing is magical – its appeal lies in the creation of imaginative worlds. Stories help us to enthrall, to intrigue, to entertain, to wonder and to bring our world and ourselves alive. There is a strong cycle that links reading, discussing, telling, listening and writing.

As writers, pupils should build up a repertoire of narrative forms that they can call upon to help them compose their own stories.

Creating a writing climate

It is important to establish a positive climate for story writing. This might feature:

- access to a wide range of quality literature;
- attractive displays that focus children's interest;
- writer of the month;
- selecting stories to tape, for other classes;
- regular reading of a wide range of stories;
- working with writers and story tellers in school on a regular basis;
- author boxes of books;
- spreading enthusiasm for stories and writers – recommendations by pupils and teachers;
- writing, reading and sharing stories as the teacher.

Writing narrative – principles

- The roots of story writing lie in a rich experience of listening to and watching stories, drama and role play, early story reading, frequent rereading of favourites and the telling/retelling of all forms of story.
- Use drama, video and puppets to help build up the content and context for stories.
- Imitation – early story composition can be based on imitating well-loved tales.
- Innovation – encourage young writers to base their stories on known tales, making changes to characters, settings, or events.
- Invention – as young writers acquire a good store of stories they can mix the ingredients and invent their own.
- Consider how different types of story have typical patterns, characters, settings, events and are written in differing styles.
- Provide audiences for writing, e.g. classroom scrapbooks, taped performances.

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Find out more about writing narrative



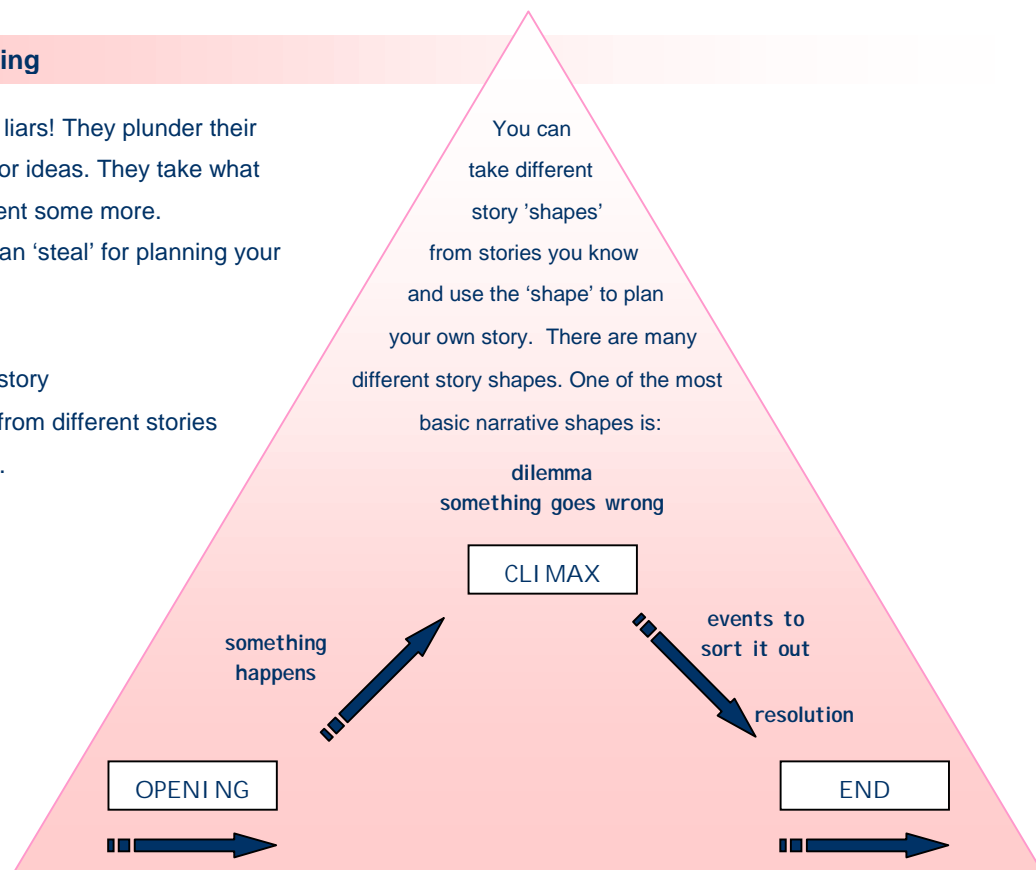
Further teaching ideas and case studies can be found on the NLS website: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy
See also pages 154-155, *Grammar for writing* and *Developing early writing*.

Preparing and planning

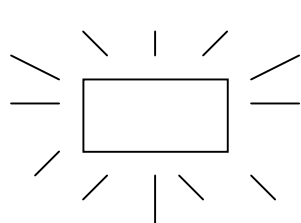
Writers are thieves and liars! They plunder their reading and their lives for ideas. They take what they know and then invent some more.

Some techniques you can 'steal' for planning your own stories:

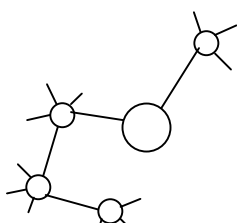
- retelling stories
- changing a known story
- mixing ingredients from different stories
- retelling anecdotes.



You might start planning by jotting down ideas.

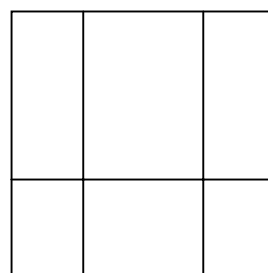


Brainstorming

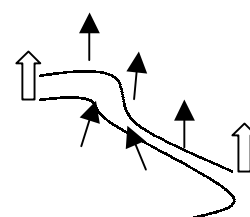


Mind map

You might plan by drawing your ideas.



Story board

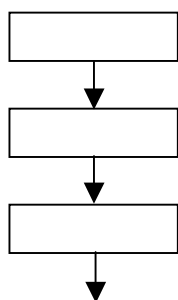


Story map

You can plan by putting events in order.

1. Tom gets a bike
2. Rides to Gran's
3. Falls off ...
- 4.

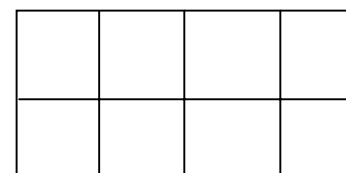
List of scenes



Flow chart

Once upon a time ...
One morning ...
Suddenly ...

Using connectives
in a frame



Paragraph grid

Characterisation and settings

- Stories can begin with a character or a place.
- Choose names with care. Make a class collection of names that might be used in stories. The right name suggests character, e.g. *Mrs Savage*, *Scrooge*, *Mrs Twit*.
- Keep description limited to a few details that suggest something about the character, e.g. *she walked down the street in her red leggings*. Weave description into the tale. Use details to bring characters alive – unusual clothing, how they walk or talk, typical expressions, their eyes or mouth, their hands, a special interest or talent. Make the details a little unusual.
- Too much description of a character, or a place, may interfere with the story line.
- Possible questions to ask about the character: *what secret do they have, do they have a problem, how are they feeling, what sort of person are they, what are their wishes and fears, who else is important to them?*
- Characters are created by what they SAY (how they say it) and what they DO.
- Other character's (or the narrator's) comments can help to build up characterisation, e.g. *Jo was fed up with Sally's sulking*.
- Make sure that the character's 'type' (bossy, the leader, happy-go-lucky, shy, etc.) or their 'feeling' (angry, sad, etc) influences what they say and do.
- Dialogue should reflect character, e.g. *'I hate you all,' snarled Sam*.
- When writing dialogue think about:
 - a. what the speaker and listener do
 - b. what else is happening.
- Use this to avoid a string of speech, e.g. *'I hate you all,' snarled Sam. He rushed to the door. Sim stood and stared after his friend. Outside a car hooted*.
- Stories are about CHANGE – what happens to the characters. Make sure this is reflected in the beginning and ending.
- Use detail and sense impressions to bring places and people alive. Base people and places on what you know – plus some invention. Many writers use their own experiences, e.g. Michael Morpurgo sets stories on the Isles of Scilly where he goes for holidays.
- Use settings to create different atmospheres. Practise creating frightening settings or comfy settings.
- Use writing on location to develop an eye for detail to bring settings alive.
- Possible questions about the setting: *what is hidden there? What has just happened here or is about to happen? What is dangerous looks unusual or is out of place?*
- As well as place – think about the weather and the time of day.
- Use the principle of 'show' and 'not tell'.

Practise writing scenes from stories so that you become skilful at paragraphing and writing, e.g. openings, build-ups, complications, dilemmas, cliff hangers, suspense paragraphs, atmospheric settings, resolving problems, endings

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Helping the story progress

- Have a working title but be prepared to alter this.
- Put numbers on pages; leave spaces between scenes – this helps to give the feeling of accomplishment.
- Think of the story or paragraphs as a series of scenes.
- If stuck, go back to the plan, imagine a new scene, introduce a new character or event, find something hidden, look in a pocket, make a discovery.
- Collect story triggers – incidents that get scenes going, e.g. *a phone rings*.
- Keep in mind a simple story idea, e.g. *two children get lost but find their way home*.
- If stuck use your whiteboard or notebook to jot ideas, mind map some possibilities.
- Collect and use paragraph openings:
 - Change of place – *On the other side of town...*
 - Change of time – *The next day...*
 - Change of person – *Tom entered the room...*
 - Change of event – *At that moment a dog barked...*
 - Change of speaker – *'Hi,' said the girl...*
- Pace yourself as a writer – avoid rushing any part – but do not elaborate too much.
- Reread every now and then but don't let this stop you from driving on to the end.

Writing endings

- Knowing where your story is going can help you concentrate on the quality of your writing. However, if you near the end and a better idea comes along – then use it.
- Don't cop out with a tricky ending, e.g. *It was all just a dream*.
- Distinguish the end of a story from the resolving of the plot. At the end of the story you could:
 - describe, or show, the character's feelings
 - reflect on events (provide a moral)
 - look to the future
 - mention some object or detail from the story
 - reread the beginning to see if some sort of link can be made or to show how a character has changed.

You can download this flier from the web and adapt it for direct use by children or to create posters for your writing area.

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