

Can We Do Some Dabbling? Reading & Writing Connecting

The Writing For Pleasure Centre – Ross Young

@WritingRocks_17

Principle(s) in focus:

1. Literacy for pleasure: reading and writing connecting
2. Teaching the writing processes
3. Being a writer-teacher

Two was becoming one. Something was changing in my year four classroom. It's becoming increasingly difficult to see a difference between children reading and children writing. This example of practice looked to build a more authentic connection between how writers read and how this gives children an idea generation and planning strategy. I also wanted to share with my class what I do as a writer-teacher.

Aims:

I wanted to see how children's reading identities could have a positive influence on their writer identities. I also wanted to provide them with an idea generation technique which could increase their feelings of self-regulation (I know what to do and how to do it) and self-efficacy (feeling of confidence). I expected to see that this simple technique would have a positive impact on children during personal project writing time as well as during personal reading time. Because of how inclusive the technique is, I also suspect it will have a positive impact on children's volition (their desire) to write.

Description:

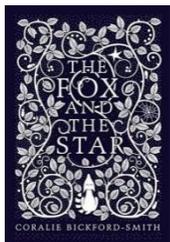
'Mining' my reading is an idea generation technique I use as a writer all the time. I'm sure many of us have had it - you read a passage or a line in a book and it conjures up in you your own interpretation, inspiration, memories or an idea for how that writing could be used for your own purposes. Well, I decided to teach this to my class.

In a way, I had already taught my class that 'dabbling' is often part of a writer's writing process. It's that space in between generating an idea and coming up with a formal plan (if that's indeed how you prefer to write). I had previously shown [this video](#) of David Almond talking about his process. Now the children in my class will often 'dabble' as they read or are read to.

Using Dabbling To 'Mine' Your Reading For Writing Ideas.

Like all good writing mini-lessons, we started by doing it all together. As I read *The Fox And The Star*, I asked the children to draw or write anything that particularly struck them. I then read it for a second time and asked the children to write down any phrases they thought could be great lines for a poem or a story. After this, we discussed the things we had noticed and talked about our drawings a little with one another. I then I asked the children to circle their favourite things that had struck them and gave them 15 minutes to turn it into 'something'. Below, you can see some of the results from this quick activity.

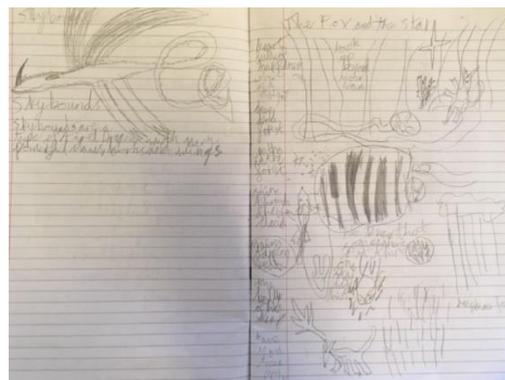
The Fox & The Star
By Coralie Bickford-Smith



Child's response:

Untitled

Once beyond time, there lived a fox, who lived in a star. Not on the fiery surface, but in the middle of it, where it was bathed in pure light. The fox, each night, would travel down from the star and give hope to the hopeless. He lived upon a wishing star, so each night he would wish hope on the star itself. He would chant 'oh star, oh star, give the hopeless hope!' And his wish was always granted. At day, he would peer down from the grand view of the star, searching for ones who needed hope.



One day, he was looking down, far beyond where he used to, and he fell from the star. He was a star fox so he would not be hurt, but he was scared he wouldn't be able to get back. He was just about to try and fly back when suddenly he heard crying. It seemed to be coming from the south. The fox headed towards where the crying was coming from.

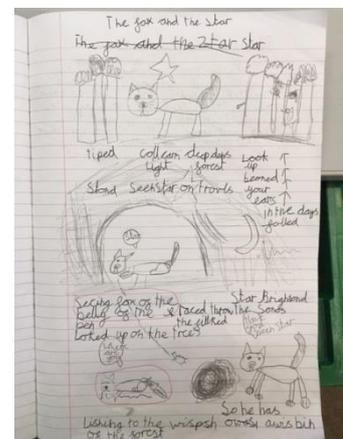
STARS!

Look up, look up,
Beyond your ears
The stars are waiting
Shining brightly through the
clouds
They make your eyes shine at
night
It's like a happy light bobbling
independently in a lake of ink
Shining brightly you might lose
your eye sight
But the happy stars are here to
guide you
Through the dark and gloomy
night.

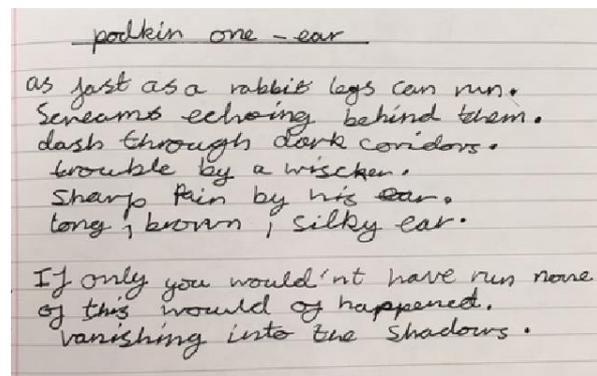
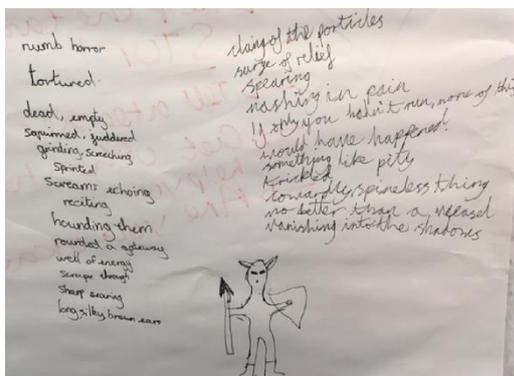


The Fox That Never Woke Up

'Wake up fox, wake up' said the whistling wind.
'Oh, how I've missed getting chased by you' said the
squeaking voice of the Beetle.
Trees rustling in the distant wind. Then all was quiet.
The fox never woke up.
His cave dark and gloomy.
Everything. Stop.
The moving of the beetle. Stop.
The whistling wind. Stop.
The fox will never wake up.

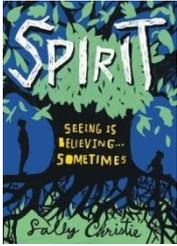


The following day, I asked the children to use the same technique whilst I read our class read-aloud *Podkin One Ear*. Whilst I read, two children came up to the front and on flipchart paper 'dabbled' their ideas publicly so that, as a class, we could see how other writers approached the technique.



Finally, I asked the children to undertake the technique during our daily DEAR (drop everything and read) times over the course of the week – to try it out and see what happens – to see what emerges. Below are some examples:

Spirit by Sally Christie



Child's response:
Untitled

Huddled in his cosy den, he watches the happy spirits floating in the cool bright breeze – whispering like a dream.

He could hear the spirits singing to the cloud like the voices of children.

Trouble At School



Lina & Ivy: trouble at school

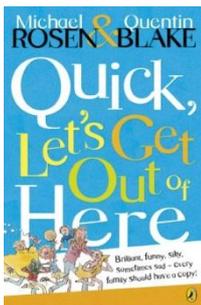
*Once, there were two girls called Ivy and Lina. They loved school but not this day because it was Mr. Young! He was teaching the class about funny jokes. Funny jokes about... golf! *slaps face* We didn't mind Mr. Young – it's just his golf jokes are really rather terrible. We think he's a nice teacher and all but it's just getting a little too crazy.*

We have a class pet called Chedgy and she is a flying pig! We have lots of friends who are nice to us and one of them is called Oliver. Oliver and Mr. Young were the only ones who would laugh at his jokes.

Back to the story

So it was just another normal day at Swingboat Junior School but Lina and Ivy heard there was a new girl coming into school. Her name was Maria.

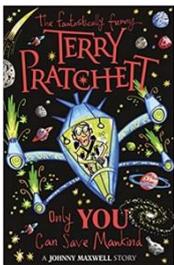
Quick Let's Get Out Of Here by Michael Rosen



-> Wrote this on my own. Published by me <-

Time for bed, time for bed children, rush upstairs until you are fed up. Brush your teeth, brush your teeth until you've made them squeaky clean. Get PJs, get PJs – find them in the cupboard. Get them on until you are tired and sleepy. Into bed, into bed – when Mum comes up. Go to sleep, go to sleep. Night night my sleeping children.

Only You Can Save Mankind By Terry Pratchett



The Boy Who Got Sucked Into A Computer Game.

*Oh no really – did I have to die?! Beep! Booop! Crack!
Now I have lost all my coins (I got angry).*

*'Joe, it's time for dinner,'
'Coming Mum!'*

The dinner waiting for me is a pizza.

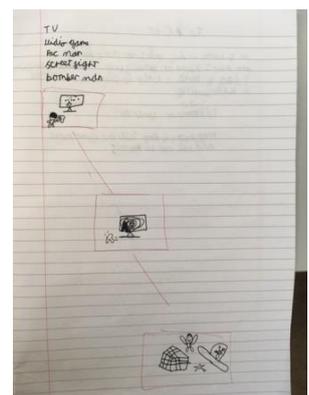
Once I finish, I have ice-cream and chocolate sauce. Then I get back onto my game. Oh no!

Oh no!

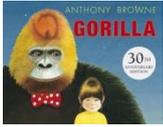
Weeee

I got sucked into the game. I saw PacMan (and his ghosts). It was quite amazing. I saw aliens. But I have to get out of here – to my family. So I walk on and fall down a hole and an alien called Zarg gave me a rather bizarre rubrics cube to solve. To solve it meant to go home.

'I'm so pleased,' my mum said. 'Where have you been all these years? It's 2053'. 'I'm joking, you only went for a few minutes and I'm glad you're home'.



Gorilla by Anthony
Browne



Untitled

Before the night of my birthday, something rather scary happened. I heard a clicking in my room and my door creaked open. My guinea pig was squeaking and it woke me right out of my bed. I went straight to my mum and dad's bedroom but they weren't there so I banked on legging it to the front door but when I got there it was locked. I felt then that I needed to find it before it found me! So I found my nerve guns and positioned myself behind the sofa. I was ready. 'Watch out pig,' I whispered. I shot it, got back to my bed and there I stayed. At the end of my bed was a parcel. In it was a gun and a letter and it said: beware there is a thing in the house. Protect yourself Ollie.

Impact:

The impact of this series of mini-lessons has been extraordinary. I've seen benefits in terms of the engagement and attention children are giving to their reading. They are reading with much more focus and are thinking as writers when they read. It's had a major impact on our personal writing project time as children have an idea generation technique that they can always use to help to find potential writing ideas. It's been fascinating observing how children switch between their reading and their personal writing books during DEAR time too. Parents have commented on how the children have taught the technique to them, asking their parents to dabble as they read to them at home.

Reflection:

I would like to use this technique as the basis for a whole class writing project. I think it would be a great way to introduce a short-story writing project. It feels like it has the potential to be a more efficient and effective way into writing than the book planning approach we have used previously. I'm also interested in its potential when used with non-fiction texts.

References:

- David Almond: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVFh9FquoKY&t=917s>