

Imaginative writing: Our viewpoint



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Imaginative writing is important. It's important to children and adult writers alike. Imaginative writing can be found in all aspects of a writer's life. For example, knowing how to write with imagination is great currency. Writing for political or civic reasons - sharing your knowledge and opinions with clarity and vision is essential. We want children to write for personal reasons - as an act of reflection or social dreaming. Finally, we want them to know how to write for reasons of pure pleasure and playful escapism - feeling a sense of joy and accomplishment in sharing their artistry with themselves or others in ways that are profound and creative. We want children to live the writer's life fully after they leave school.

We have absolute belief and faith in children. We think they are really funny, original, interesting, thoughtful, and super smart. It's our view that they are in the prime of their imaginative lives. Yet the sad truth is that, in many schools, children are often 'denied the chance to share with their teacher *their own* imaginative topic ideas' (Young & Ferguson [2020](#) p.45). Instead, there is an insistence by a scheme writer (or a teacher) that thirty near-identical newspaper articles or diary entries must be written, whether children have a say in it or not and whether children are motivated by it or not. This does not represent to us a vibrant and imaginative community of writers.

We do not have an issue with the imaginative aspect of 'the letter to Dumbledore,' 'the newspaper article about Tutankhamun,' 'the letter begging glue sticks to come back into the classroom' or 'a diary entry about finding a dragon egg on the playground' in themselves. The issue resides in how *unimaginative* it is to ask every child to write about exactly the same thing in exactly the same way. We want to develop a nation who produces writing, not a generation who has only ever learnt to consume and regurgitate other people's ideas. Therefore, an important question to ask is: who gets to conceive these imaginative ideas, and why? If the topic is solely the brainchild of a scheme writer or teacher, it can often feel like 'enforced fun', and is actually more in keeping with traditional teaching than imaginative writing (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)). It's traditional teaching, but with a few party streamers, bells and whistles attached to act as ploys to coax children into doing what is really a writing assignment for teacher evaluation.

When scheme writers or teachers routinely come up with the ideas for imaginative class writing projects, there are a number of issues:

- Children suffer from 'learnt helplessness' and begin to rely on a scheme or their teacher for writing ideas. In the process, children become dependent, not independent, writers (Young & Ferguson [2022a](#), [2022b](#)).

- Scheme writers or teachers who regularly choose topics derived from *their own* interests and cultures are only ever helping children who are most ‘like them’ (Young et al. [2022](#)).
- Children fail to establish key cognitive and affective resources which *The Science Of Writing* identifies as being essential to children’s writing development. For example, their knowledge and skills surrounding conceptualisation and reconceptualisation, ideation, inference, intertextuality, perspective taking, and ‘theory of mind’ (Young & Ferguson [2022b](#)).

In our view, imaginative writing can only be crafted by children if their classroom is headed up by a writer-teacher who isn't ego-centric. Why should it be scheme writers in their offices or teachers in their PPA time that get to have all the fun? A teacher who cares deeply that children get to write imaginatively creates the conditions for children to be imaginative. They help children construct their own imaginative writing projects. These teachers understand that their job is to support children to write the most successful text they possibly can based on the idea that they’ve chosen to pursue (Young & Ferguson [2021](#) p.114).

It's time we trusted children and put imaginative writing back into their hands.

So how can we encourage them to write imaginatively?

- We can ensure we teach them a variety of idea generation techniques that other writers use to write imaginatively (Young & Ferguson [2022](#)). This includes how writers enjoy ‘writing in role’ or writing for and within their favourite fictional worlds.
- By helping them identify a readership for their writing that goes beyond just their teacher’s evaluation.
- By reassuring them that we will teach them loads of *craft moves* which will make their writing really great (Young et al. [2021](#)).
- By acknowledging the power of imaginative play. With their writer’s notebooks within touching distance, children can play with ideas and, when one strikes, they can quickly write it down (Young & Ferguson [2020](#)).
- We can introduce children to the concept of ‘faction’ (The Writing For Pleasure Centre [2022](#)). This is when writers will play with narrative-based non-fiction.
- We can invite children to have an *Ideas Party* and come up with different ways in which they can write in imaginative response to the book the class is reading (Young & Ferguson [2020](#), [2021a](#)). Of course, as writer-teachers, teachers can participate and make contributions to these *Ideas Parties* too.
- Again, children and writer-teachers can have an *Ideas Party* together in imaginative response to what they are learning in the wider curriculum (Young & Ferguson [2021](#), [2022](#)).

Put simply, you know a class writing project is imaginative if you don’t know what the children are going to produce. If you can teach a writing project a hundred times and never be sure what your class will write about, you’re on the right lines. Ultimately, a writing project has gone well if you receive 30+ playful and varied pieces. These pieces are not only successful in terms of the objectives of the curriculum but also meaningful to the young authors who decided to make them.

References

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