Flash-Fiction Unit Plan

The Writing For Pleasure Centre
- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Why write flash-fiction?

Sometimes called micro-fiction or sudden fiction, flash fiction isn't just a very short story, it's a flash moment – part of a much larger untold story, where much is left unexplained. They are typically no longer than 1000 words, but can be as short as 100 words (when it's called a drabble) or even 20–50 words (a dribble). Flash fiction challenges children to move forward in their narrative writing from Years 3-5 where they are often asked to write a single short story. For this project, they are essentially creating a whole anthology of micro stories! In the process, they become more discerning with words and learn to infuse their pieces with aspects of poetry and literary technique. Indeed, flash fiction can sometimes be seen as an extension of free-verse poetry.

Children tend to enjoy making their flash fiction anthologies, as it encourages them to come away from the habit of writing at length and to think more carefully about how they can say the things they wish to say. Flash fiction shows children that their narrative writing in the past may have sometimes 'lost its way' by becoming rambling and disorganised. The hope with this writing project is that it has a lasting positive effect on their future story writing. Writers have to be disciplined at the revision stage, deleting rather than adding, and being honest with themselves as to whether that particular adjective or adverb is really vital to the piece. Flash-fiction will become a genre enjoyed by the children in your class and is a pleasure to hear read aloud.

Finally, this project couldn't be better suited for collecting evidence for the greater-depth writing standard.

Things to bear in mind

- An interesting observation is that, when writing short stories, children often opt for a spooky, mysterious or unexplained ending, typically indicated by ellipsis . . . Alternatively they attempt to reveal or tie everything up in the final sentence. So it's worth encouraging children to consider their last line carefully. An interesting strategy is to get children to actually write their ending in the middle of their piece and have the narrator conclude with a passage reflecting on the significance of what has happened in the story.

- A successful piece of Flash-Fiction does not tell readers the whole story but leaves them to fill in the gaps, what it could have been about or what will happen next. Reading one is often like walking in halfway through a film or leaving before the end. Looking at a narrative painting or photograph is another useful analogy here.

- Discourage children from introducing too many characters. One is often enough. They don't even need to explain who the character is or where they came from and can choose one physical feature of their character (eyes, mouth, voice) through which to convey their personality.

- Ultimately, children should be encouraged to choose between developing a setting or a character within their flash fiction. It's also a good idea to think of a good hard-working title, which children should do after their piece has been drafted.

- Rather than working on crafting a single story as they have done in all the previous years, by Year 6, children will be invited to produce a whole collection of flash-fiction pieces.

- By creating a collection of stories, children can focus on writing some which are character-driven, others that are setting-focused, and some which look to focus on creating a very specific type of atmosphere.

The journey of a class writing project

Introduce the new project

⬇

Read as writers
Establish product goals

⬇

Generate ideas

⬇

Plan

⬇

Draft

⬇

Revise
Check use of product goals

⬇

Proof-read

⬇

Publish

Example project plan

Day 1	Introduce the new project - establish/share publishing goal - share what their texts are going to look like
Day 2	Begin reading as writers, studying mentor texts, and establishing product goals
Day 3	Continue to read as writers and set product goals
Day 4	Finalise the product goals for the project
Day 5	Generate ideas by having an *Ideas Party*
Day 6	Take the *Writing Register*
Day 7	Mini-lesson on using a planning technique - children plan using the technique
Day 8	Continue planning if required
Day 9	*Drafting* mini-lesson - children write their first flash-fiction
Day 10	*Drafting* mini-lesson - children write their second flash-fiction
Day 11	*Drafting* mini-lesson - children write their third flash-fiction
Day 12	*Drafting* mini-lesson - children write their fourth flash-fiction
Day 13	*Drafting* mini-lesson - children write their fifth flash-fiction
Day 14	*Revision* mini-lesson - children 'try it out'/revise the mini-lesson into their piece
Day 15	*Revision* mini-lesson - children 'try it out'/revise the mini-lesson into their piece
Day 16	*Revision Checklist sessions* - children check their writing against the class' product goals
Day 17	*Revision Checklist sessions* - children check their writing against the class' product goals
Day 18	*Revision Checklist sessions* - children check their writing against the class' product goals
Day 19	Capitalisation - 'proof-reading for capitalisation' mini-lesson
Day 20	Capitalisation - 'proof-reading for capitalisation' mini-lesson
Day 21	Use of vocab 'proof-reading for tense use' mini-lesson
Day 22	Use of vocab 'proof-reading for tense use' mini-lesson
Day 23	Use of vocab (synonyms) - 'cracking open boring words' mini-lesson
Day 24	Punctuation - proof-reading mini-lesson
Day 25	Punctuation - proof-reading mini-lesson
Day 26	Spelling (common words) - children correct any misspelt words
Day 27	Spelling (class' tricky words) - children correct any misspelt words
Day 28	Spelling (temporary spellings) - children correct any misspelt words
Day 29	Spelling (temporary spellings) - children correct any misspelt words
Day 30	Spelling (temporary spellings) - children correct any misspelt words
Day 31	Publishing - write out just a few sections - mini-lesson & pupil-conferencing focuses on handwriting instruction
Day 32	Publishing - write out just a few sections - mini-lesson & pupil-conferencing focuses on handwriting instruction
Day 33	Publishing Party!

Important! Please read!

- This is just an *example plan*. Therefore, you should use your own professional judgement to plan your own class writing projects. For example, you should either add or remove sessions based on your own class' needs and the amount of time you want to spend on the project. For more information, download our eBook *How To Teach Writing* (**LINK**). To create your own unit plan, you can download a blank version of the proforma used on the previous page **here**.

- Remember, you should plan your mini-lessons based on the product goals your class comes up with when you're *reading as writers*. For more information on how to do this, download our eBook *How To Teach Writing* or *Reading In The Writing Classroom* (**LINK**).

- If you feel you need to, we can recommend devoting at least two sessions to planning. After the first session, you can see which plans you think are suitably ready for when children come to draft their pieces. For children who you feel need a bit more time and further instruction, you can meet with them as a group(s) while the rest of the class work on their personal writing projects. For more information on setting up personal writing projects, download **our eBook**. We also provide far more information on teaching planning techniques in our eBook: *No More: My Class Doesn't Know What To Write Next* (**LINK**).

- Whenever children have completed the process goal set for that day's writing time, they should work on their personal writing project for the rest of the lesson. For more details, see **this article**.

- We can recommend devoting a number of lessons to having 'revision checklist sessions'. This allows you to meet with your class in small groups and give them quality verbal feedback on their compositions. The rest of your class work on their personal writing projects.

- Make sure you break your proof-reading lessons down into small manageable chunks over a number of days. This allows children to achieve a high level of accuracy. These sessions don't take children very long. Once they've completed their proof-reading for the day, they can work on their personal writing projects. We provide far more information and lessons on proof-reading in our eBook: *No More: 'My Pupils Can't Edit!' A Whole-School Approach To Developing Proof-Readers* (**LINK**).

- The more time spent on a project, the better the final outcomes will be. If you rush a project, you get rushed outcomes.

- It's important to remember that this is not the only writing children should produce. Children should also have their personal writing project writing, their writing in the wider curriculum subjects, and the writing they produce in their reading lessons.

Publishing goal lesson

A great publishing goal for this project is to create a class flash-fiction podcast. Each child can choose their best flash-fiction to record. The podcast could then be uploaded to the school website for others to listen to and enjoy. You can also play the podcast to your class next year!
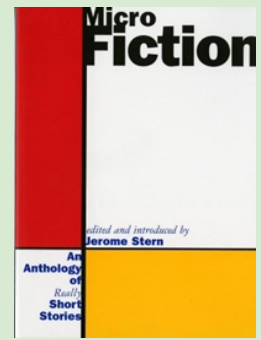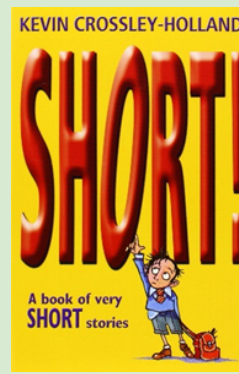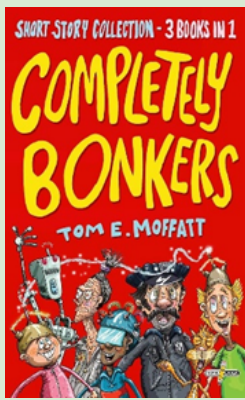
Alternatively, the children can come up with their own publishing goal for the project. For more information on how to do this, download our book *How To Teach Writing* (**LINK**).

Reading as writers and establishing your product goals lessons

When undertaking *reading as writers* sessions, we can recommend having a collection of flash-fictions for the children to read. Make sure children get to read some of the flash-fictions you and your colleagues have written and make sure you have a collection of mentor texts (texts which realistically match what you expect the children to produce). For advice on how to write your own flash-fiction, and to download our mentor texts, consider downloading the paid version of this planning: **LINK**.

Finally, it's important that children get to see examples of high-quality texts too. We can certainly recommend these:

These are great because they really show children the creative things you can do with the genre.

While undertaking your *reading as writers* sessions, you are going to want to establish your product goals (success criteria) for the project. For more information on how to do this effectively, download our book *How To Teach Writing* (**LINK**).

Have an Ideas Party

This is one of my favourite sessions. As a whole class, in small groups, on flipchart paper, come up with as many ideas as you can. The children can work in teams at their desks and you can spend time with each group and take part too! At the end of the session, individual children can circle their favourite idea theme. Children like to go home and will often continue to think of ideas for the project. Let them. As long as they know what their final writing theme is going to be by time you take the Writing Register.

Taking a *Writing Register* lesson

This is a nice session. While the children are working on their personal writing projects, go round the class and ask them for a working title for their flash-fiction anthology. Write this down on your Writing Register. At the end of the writing lesson, you can share this register with the children and have a chat about which pieces people are most looking forward to reading.

Teaching a planning technique lesson

It's important to teach children a planning technique. It's even more important that you show children the planning technique you used when you wrote your *flash-fictions*. Teach them the technique and show them your plan before inviting them to use the technique for themselves that day.

If you need more help with this, download our eBook: *No More: My Class Don't Know What To Write Next...* (**LINK**). It has loads of great planning techniques in it.

Teaching your drafting lessons

At this point in the project, you are going to want to teach and model one *craft move* from your product goal list before inviting the children to use the move for themselves that day. Of course, these craft moves can be grammar or sentence-level moves. To see examples of what these lessons can look like, consider downloading the paid version for this planning: **LINK**.

Teaching your revision lessons

Now the children have drafted their writing, you can teach them more sophisticated *craft moves*. They can try the craft move out on their 'trying things out page' and if they like what they've crafted, they can add it into their drafted text. These sessions are really interesting because the children feel free to take risks and enjoy playing around with these more advanced techniques. Remember, model one craft move before inviting the children to use the technique for themselves that day. For examples of what these lessons can look like, consider downloading the paid version for this planning: **LINK**.

Revision checklist sessions

These are lovely sessions. Meet with your children in small groups. Make sure everyone has a copy of the product goals you established at the beginning of the project. With the group, check whether people have used and/or considered the *craft moves* for the project. Any children that haven't, can be invited to show how they might use the craft move on their 'trying things out page'. If they like what they have crafted, they can include it in their final piece. If they don't want to - that's fine. You still have evidence in their books. This also shows that the children are being discerning - one sign of a greater-depth writer.

When undertaking these sessions, the rest of the class can be working on their personal writing projects. For more information, download our eBook: *How To Teach Writing* (**LINK**).

Proof-reading sessions

We can highly recommend breaking proof-reading down into small manageable chunks. Over a number of days, you can proofread for *CUPS*. This stands for *Capitalisation, Use Of Vocabulary, Punctuation* and *Spelling*. For more information on how to conduct these sessions, download our eBook: *No More: My Class Can't Edit!* (**LINK**).

These sessions don't take the children long. Once finished, they can work on their personal writing projects.

Publishing party

The project is now coming to an end. It's time for the children to write up their final published version ready for their readers. This is a great opportunity to teach handwriting in context and give children live verbal feedback and additional individualised handwriting instruction. We can recommend doing this over a couple of days.

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You can download a more detailed version of this planning which includes individual lessons plans, resources and mentor texts here: **LINK**.

Remember, all our planning is free to our members. To become a member, sign up **here**.