

ROB PARKINSON'S WORK ON THE ABLE WRITERS SCHEME

I'm a writer but very much a storyteller too – I've been a professional since 1984. This sometimes causes teachers some confusion, compounded by the fact that I'm also a songwriter and musician and use an unusual variety of instruments too, whilst I've published poems along with song lyrics and tall tales with Caboodle and write on the uses of stories for therapy as well as in education. To clarify then, for Able Writers sessions I don't (unless specifically asked) focus exclusively on oral storytelling, nor on verse or song writing (and certainly not on therapy). I do use storytelling and will probably sing a fantasy song, read a poem or two and play my instruments as starting points to move into playing story games then (as a main focus) writing stories. The main features of the work I do on the scheme are:-

- It works from storytelling into writing in fun ways, showing how the two connect and complement each other.
- The initial oral session has the important extra advantage of bringing pupils from different schools or groups together in talk activities around stories before writing. This improves group atmosphere a lot – something that's important during the day and is enhanced during the final 'sharing/performance' session. Children have a good social time together as well as learning, one reason the sessions have been popular as an 'icebreaker' with new and developing groups.
- Unusual instruments are used during the brief introductory performance and re-introduced during the final performance session.
- It teaches ways to develop and handle plots, motifs, styles and themes flexibly and coherently. The central focus is on story 'logic' and conception plus ways to elaborate a narrative effectively and imaginatively, though I can work on more detailed language skills in individual stories with individual writers during the feedback part of the day.
- Each academic year, I introduce a new theme. Themes from recent years remain available (see list) and other options can also be discussed if schools involved have a special interest or theme.

- Notes are provided for teachers and other adults, giving a guide to the workshop and hence a clearer understanding of what is going on and how they can help.
- Notes for children are also provided, so that they can explain clearly to parents what they have been doing and to remind them of detail
- Methods adapt well to different age groups and abilities, hence similar workshops can be given for younger and older Able Writers groups as well as for the typical Year 5 & 6 groups.
- Back up resources for teachers are available from the Imaginary Journeys website including examples of stories around previous years' themes winning the Imaginary Journeys story competition prizes. (These competitions ran from 2005 to 2010 but are not currently happening.)

Themes for Able Writers workshops:

Newest theme

Began March 2013 - *Adventure Stories: From fairy tales to gangsters to alien monsters.*

The Enchanting Bird, an ancient quest plot, is told in vivid fairy tale/fantasy form with appropriate music in the opening session. Following this, a series of fun oral games show how to develop new settings, characters and adventures to fit the outline. The 'rule of 3' is explored in plot construction and also for vivid description incorporation similes, alliteration and metaphot. Writers go on to create their own tales based on the original but in their own preferred idiom during the day.

Previous years (All themes still available on request:

Academic year 2011 -12: *Family Fantasies - tales, legends and fantastical observations from the secret worlds of families.* Ways to find discover fiction at home and/or without travelling too far (except in imagination).

2010 – 11 *The Voyage of Mael Dun – strange voyages of fantastical exploration*

Starting from an updated version of the 10th Century bardic epic sometimes called the Irish Odyssey, strange islands are visited through storytelling and linked into longer narratives in writing (Download resource from Imaginary Journeys website www.imaginaryjourneys.co.uk/stories.htm)

2009 – 10 *Tall Tales & Likely Legends* - How to turn pure fibs and absurd fantasies into just about believable stories – and vice versa. (Leading to the 2010 Imaginary Journeys Story Competition for Writers Under 12 – see website. Download on this theme also available)

2008 - 9 *Fabulous Fables* - Re-telling and re-shaping old fables and inventing exciting ones in any style. (Leading to the 2009 Imaginary Journeys Story Competition for Writers Under 12 – winning stories can be read on the website plus a download titled *Telling Fables*)

2007 – 8 *Fantasy Quests* - How to plot and create a quest story and develop interesting fantasy around the plot line. (Leading to the 2008 Imaginary Journeys Story Competition for Writers Under 12 – winning stories can be read on the website)

2006 – 7 *Wishes Three* Creative ways to use and to vary the famous three wishes plot. (Leading to the 2007 Imaginary Journeys Story Competition for Writers Under 12 – winning stories can be read on the website and there is an extensive download titled *Wishes Three*)

Especially for Younger Groups:

Most of the themes above can be adapted for younger groups. A session that has been very successful down to Year 2 is The King's Beard, a younger version of the Wishes Three theme, which can be presented as a whole or half day workshop.

INSET

A short, well-focused twilight INSET session can be given following the day for a relatively small extra fee, explaining techniques used during the day and how these can be adapted for less able pupils and integrated in literacy work. Longer INSET sessions can be discussed.

Relevant publications and resources:

Storytelling & Imagination - Beyond basic literacy 8 - 14 (Routledge 2010)

Transforming Tales - How stories can change people (Jessica Kingsley 2009)

My Dad's Not a Dog (and other family fantasies) poems, lyrics & tall tales
(Caboodle Books) 2011

Tall Tale Telling (24 fun games for making & telling incredible stories) - 2004

Imagine On (24 fun ways to picture & tell marvellous stories)- 2005

Yarn Spinning (24 fun ways to stretch a tale in the telling) - 2007

New Lamps from Old (24 fun games for making tales from old plots) – 2007

Plus 6 CDs available from Imaginary Journeys www.imaginaryjourneys.co.uk