

The Story that Wrote Itself has been developed to support the teaching of literacy in schools at Key Stage Two and to reinforce much of the work covered in class on narrative texts and creative writing.

The main focus of the play is on how to plot, structure and write a narrative story using a variety of techniques, such as using an existing story, following a basic story structure and creating a paragraph plan. Thus, throughout the play we follow the birth of a story, its plot and character development, until finally we see the finished article and along the way we discover how interesting adjectives, adverbs and similies can enhance our prose and create atmosphere and character.

The play has been written to support the National Strategy for Literacy focussing on the Literacy Framework Narrative Unit and in particular the unit concerning 'Stories set in imaginary worlds'. However, the play is certainly relevant to any work relating to the Narrative section of the Literacy framework, providing the audience with useful techniques to aid all storytelling.

The following pages provide a summary of the work covered and examples of how it is put into practice in the play.

Looking at well-known stories



Well-known stories are a great place to start when exploring narrative and how to put together your own story. Comparing various versions of the same story, such as book, film or TV versions can highlight how certain aspects of character, setting and story are created. Different well-known stories of the same genre can be compared to find the similarities in each to show the children that certain generic features are common to certain types of literature and from here they can begin to formulate their own narratives. We have chosen 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and 'Little Red Riding Hood' as our well-know texts and throughout the play we use their writing and structure to illustrate certain points.

Adjectives, adverbs and similies

The play begins with an exercise in identifying the adjectives, adverbs and similies in a small section taken from 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe':

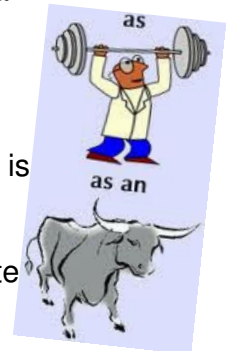
*'On the middle of the sledge sat a **great** lady. She was covered in **white** fur up to her throat and held a **long straight golden** wand in her hand. Her face was **white** – not merely pale, but **white like snow or paper or icing-sugar.**'*
*'And what, pray, are you?' said the Lady, looking **hard** at Edmund.*
*'I'm – I'm – my name's Edmund,' said Edmund rather **awkwardly.**'*

First the children are asked to find the adjectives in the piece, and as our hero Harvey can't remember what an adjective is, his friend Grace reminds everyone that an adjective describes a noun, and that a noun is a person or thing. Armed with this knowledge with the audience he identifies *great, white, long, straight, golden* and *white* again. The words are put in the class 'word bank' – and strung across the set to refer back to for future use.



Next they are asked to find the adverbs and, after Grace has reminded Harvey that an adverb describes a verb and that a verb is a 'doing word', again with the audience they identify *hard* and *awkwardly* as the adverbs: the witch is looking hard and Edmund speaks awkwardly. These two words are added to the word bank.

Finally they must find the simile in the piece. Grace explains that a simile is a comparison using 'like' or 'as' – 'as white as snow'. With the audience they identify *white like snow or paper or icing sugar* and the simile is added to the word bank.



Having completed this task the children are told that it is now their turn to write a story to *The Mysterious Disappearance of Mr Winchlever* a prize and the rest of the play looks at practical ways of how this can be done.

Features of Fantasy Literature



Harvey's class is asked to list the common features of fantasy literature for homework. His friend Grace already knows! They usually start with **a doorway**, a way from this world into the fantasy world, eg. The wardrobe in 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe'. They are often simple **tales of 'goodies' versus 'baddies'** and there's usually a **journey or quest to save the fantasy world**. There's often **lots of magic and lots of magical or mythical creatures**.

Harvey starts his story

Harvey's mind wanders in class when he sees a fly buzzing at the classroom window. In his mind it turns into an Eagle and he fights it. This image is the starting point for Harvey in his task of writing a story. (When C.S Lewis wrote 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' he started with an image of a Fawn and a Lamp Post which came to him first when he was 16. He didn't write the book until he was 40!)

Throughout the play Harvey takes inspiration from his life around him to develop his story and move it on. This first image gives him the idea that the eagle is a messenger from another world, but his thoughts are interrupted by Annabel and Taylor who are plotting to stop Grace from winning the competition. From this, Harvey develops his storyline: he will have a wise queen, like Grace, and someone who wants to steal her crown, like Annabel. To name his main characters he tries Grace's name backwards, Queen Ecarg, and the evil sister he calls Belanna. Everybody loved Queen Ecarg, except



her sister Belanna, who with the help of the wizard Arshavin (Taylor is an Arsenal supporter!) casts a spell on Ecarg and throws her into the deepest darkest dungeon. As Grace's favourite font is Garamond he decides that Garamond should be the name of his fantasy world.

Harvey checks his story so far against the features of fantasy literature: he has his doorway – the classroom window with the eagle, he has his 'Goodies' versus 'Baddies', he has his main characters, and he has his fantasy world. Next step is to develop his story.

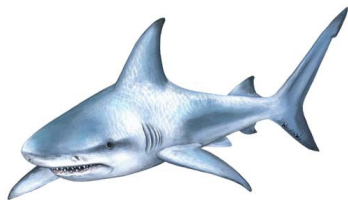
Structuring a Story



A famous children's author is invited into school to help the children write a story. Her first piece of advice is, if you've never written a story before, try re-telling an existing story.

Using 'Little Red Riding Hood' as her template she sets about changing it into a completely different story.

Her first move is to change the location: instead of the woods she sets the story on Bondai Beach,. She then changes the characters and instead of visiting Granny Little Red Riding Hood is visiting her surfer boyfriend, Gary.



"Who would want to attack Gary?" she asks the audience and they decide that, instead of a wolf they'll have a shark!

The final character to be changed is the Woodcutter. As he saves Little Red Riding Hood and her Granny from the wolf in the original story it seems appropriate to have a life guard who saves the day in the new version. And here you have the same basic story but it is transformed out of all recognition.

You can even mix ingredients from other stories, such as Little Red Riding Hood running away from a wicked step-mother, nad having a cat called Pussin Boots!



Jaqueline now moves onto a basic story structure:

CLIMAX

(Dilemma. Something goes wrong.)

Something Happens

Events to sort it out

OPENING

*RESOLUTION
END*

Opening:	Little Red Riding Hood goes to see her Gran.
Something happens:	Meets Wolf.
Climax:	Wolf eats Gran and lays in wait for Little Red Riding Hood to arrive.
It's sorted out:	Wood Cutter arrives and recues the Gran.
Resolved:	Woodcutter kills the Wolf.

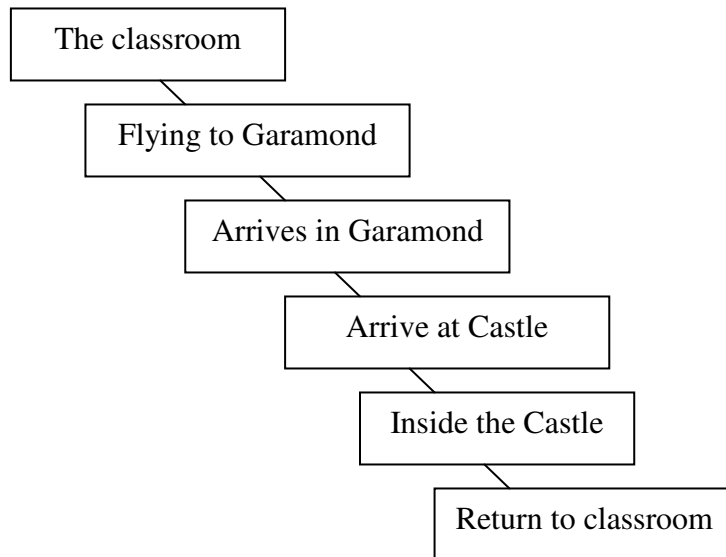
The end: They all live happily ever after (except the Wolf!).

Jaqueline concludes that a great way to come up with the events in a story is to 'Brainstorm' it.

Harvey develops his story – using a paragraph plan

Harvey has his basic plot: he starts with the boy who spent his time looking out the window, has him taken to Garamond by the eagle and then saves Queen Ecarg.

His next move is to put his story into paragraphs. Garce helps him by making up a paragraph plan for him.



Developing Character

Using a passage from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Harvey and his class explore how we learn a lot about a character from how they behave and what other people say about them.

As soon as they had said good night to the Professor, the boys came into the girls' room and they all talked it over.

'We've fallen on our feet and no mistake,' said Peter. 'This is going to be perfectly splendid. That old chap will let us do anything we like.'

From this passage we see that Peter is quite grown-up, and is fairly optimistic.

'I think he's an old dear,' said Susan.

Susan, again is quite grown-up and seems to think the best of people.

'Oh, come off it!' said Edmund, who was tired and pretending not to be tired, which always made him bad-tempered. 'Don't go on talking like that.'

Edmund, on the other hand, seems bad-tempered and quite impertinent.

'Like what?' said Susan; 'and anyway, it's time you were in bed.'

From this we can gather that Susan is older than Edmund and, speaking like her mother, can appear patronising

Trying to talk like Mother,' said Edmund. 'And who are you to say when I'm to go to bed? Go to bed yourself.'

Edmund certainly doesn't like being bossed around by his sister and seems resentful. This is borne out when he changes sides and joins the White Witch against his siblings.

'Hadn't we all better go to bed?' said Lucy. 'There's sure to be a row if we're heard talking here.'

Lucy, conversely, like to keep the peace and behave as she should.

Following on from this exercise, Harvey chooses one of his characters, the elf, and the audience hotseat him to find out a little bit more about him; is he fat, thin? What's he wearing? What's his character like? Bad tempered? How does he move? How old is he?



Setting the Scene

Finally, Miss Clarke finds various pictures of different settings for the class's stories to help create atmosphere. She tells them that the setting affects how a character will behave.

Harvey has a picture of a scary forest, and with the help of a member of the audience he explores how his main character would feel and behave if he'd just arrived in this forest. Harvey encourages the audience to come up with adjectives to describe the forest - Dark, Forbidding etc. and how Harvey might be feeling: scared, nervous, apprehensive. Etc. The words are then included in the class word bank.

AT THE END OF THE PLAY

At the end of the play the actors will hold a short (5-10 minutes) question and answer session with the children which relates to the information and issues discussed in the play. The audience is then invited to ask any other questions they may have regarding any aspect of the production.