Improving the Writing

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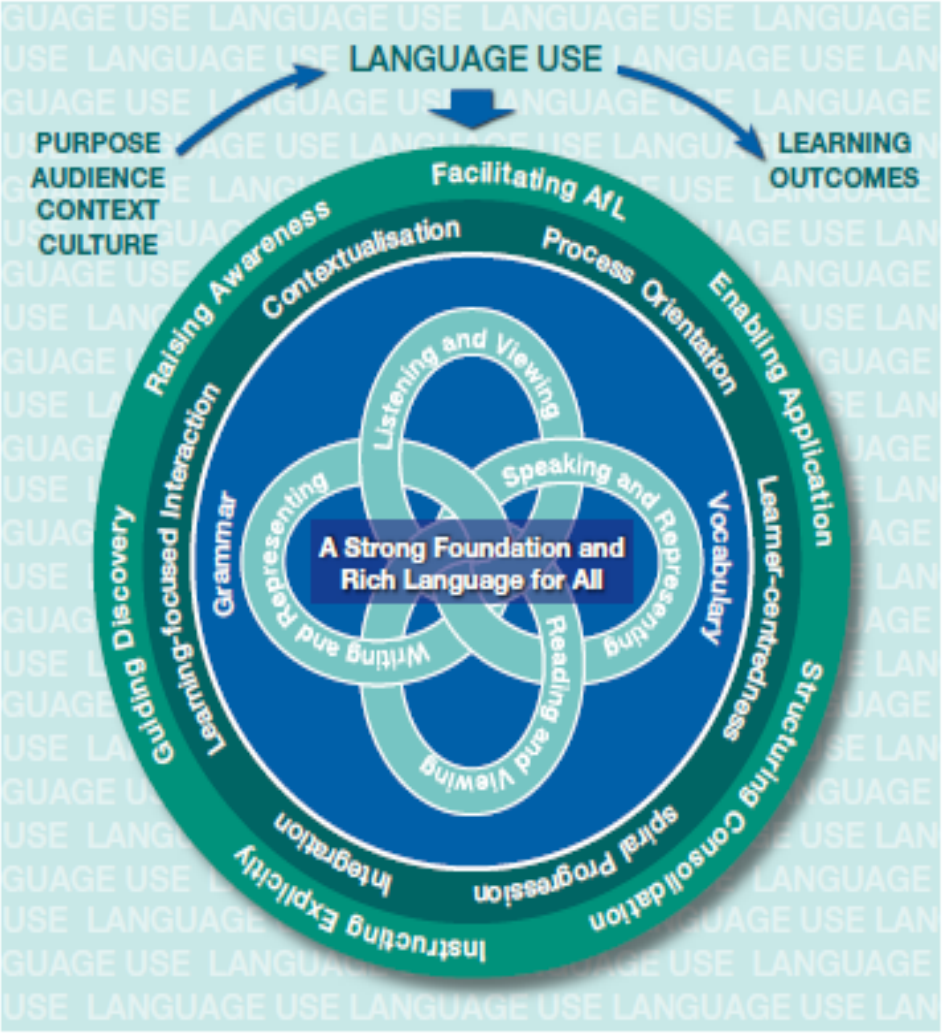
Workshop Objectives

- To develop teachers' self-awareness and analysis of the teaching of writing
- To identify and share effective writing strategies
- To foster the design of quality writing lessons

Culture of Learning

- *"Building a strong foundation in language, and enriching language learning for all."*
- *"Learners are at the centre of the teaching-learning process"* *(English Language Syllabus 2010).*

The key features of the *English Language Syllabus 2010 Primary (Foundation) & Secondary (Normal [Technical])* are shown in the following diagram:



Aim
Approach
Principles
Teaching Processes

Areas of Language Learning
Receptive and Productive Skills
Knowledge about Language

Culture of learning

- What do I my pupils need to learn?
- Why does it matter?
- What do they already know?
- How will they demonstrate learning?
- How will they get there?
- How well do I expect them to do it?

Confident Writers

- Language acquisition takes place when the learners realise how **meaning** is expressed accurately.
- Listening precedes speaking and reading precedes writing. Each one builds on and supports the other.
- Pupils become confident and articulate communicators of English by utilising their receptive and productive skills.

Writing and Representing

Writing and Representing Skills and Strategies:

- Generation and selection of ideas for writing and representing
- Development and organisation of ideas in writing and representing
- Review, revision and editing of writing and representation

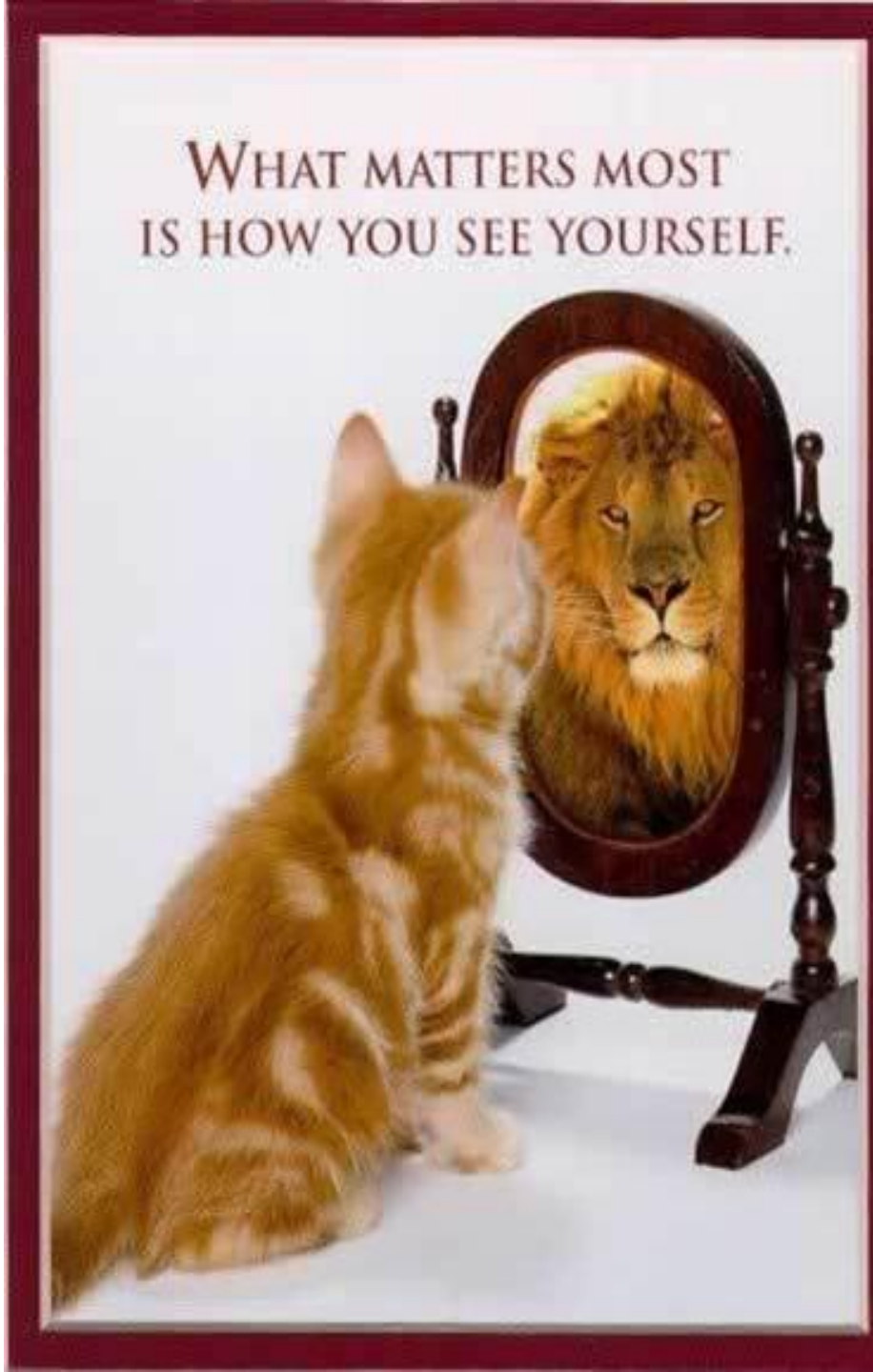
Improving Writing

To improve the quality of pupil writing:

- **Explicitly** and **systematically** teach the **structure** and **language** demands of the writing task
- Focus on the **sound, feel** and **power** of **word**s
- Focus on **audience** and **purpose**
- Explicitly teach the **thinking** processes involved in writing
- Immerse pupils in **examples** and **exemplars** of the required style of writing
- **Model, scaffold** and jointly construct texts
- Use **guided** and **independent** practice
- Employ peer and self assessment and critical reflection
- ***Write with your pupils!***

Confidence

- Creativity is innate yet starting writing is not easy!
- *'Just get black on white'* (Robert Gray, 2011).
- Fast write
- Beginning with observations, chunks of writing, little moments...a sentence a day!
- Jottings: Journal, notepad, iPhone or wiki/blog
- 12 word stories
- 50 word flash fiction: Take away the letter 'e'



Activity

- 12 word stories: Compose a 12 word story of your life.
- 50 word flash fiction: Compose a 50 word flash fiction story about writing! No letter ‘e’ allowed!

Blank, befuddled, thoughtless, bemused, he sits in front of screen as boredom ensues.

He accelerates. The thrill explodes! He clips the kerb, breathes his last.

Confidence

- Simple to super sentences!
- Glossary
- Word Clouds: Wordle and Taxedo
- Master Chef narratives
- Telling stories: Story Circle (Hot Potato Story)
- Writing from experience and passion!

A lost song

I could hear her playing as I trudged down the road from the bus stop, that intricate melody dancing on the breeze. She spun a web of golden song around her as she caressed the strings gently with her bow. No one else could make the music sound quite like that, one minute a whispering laughing child, the next, a full-blooded passionate flamenco dancer. It was as though she was back, the mother that I used to have, the one from before…

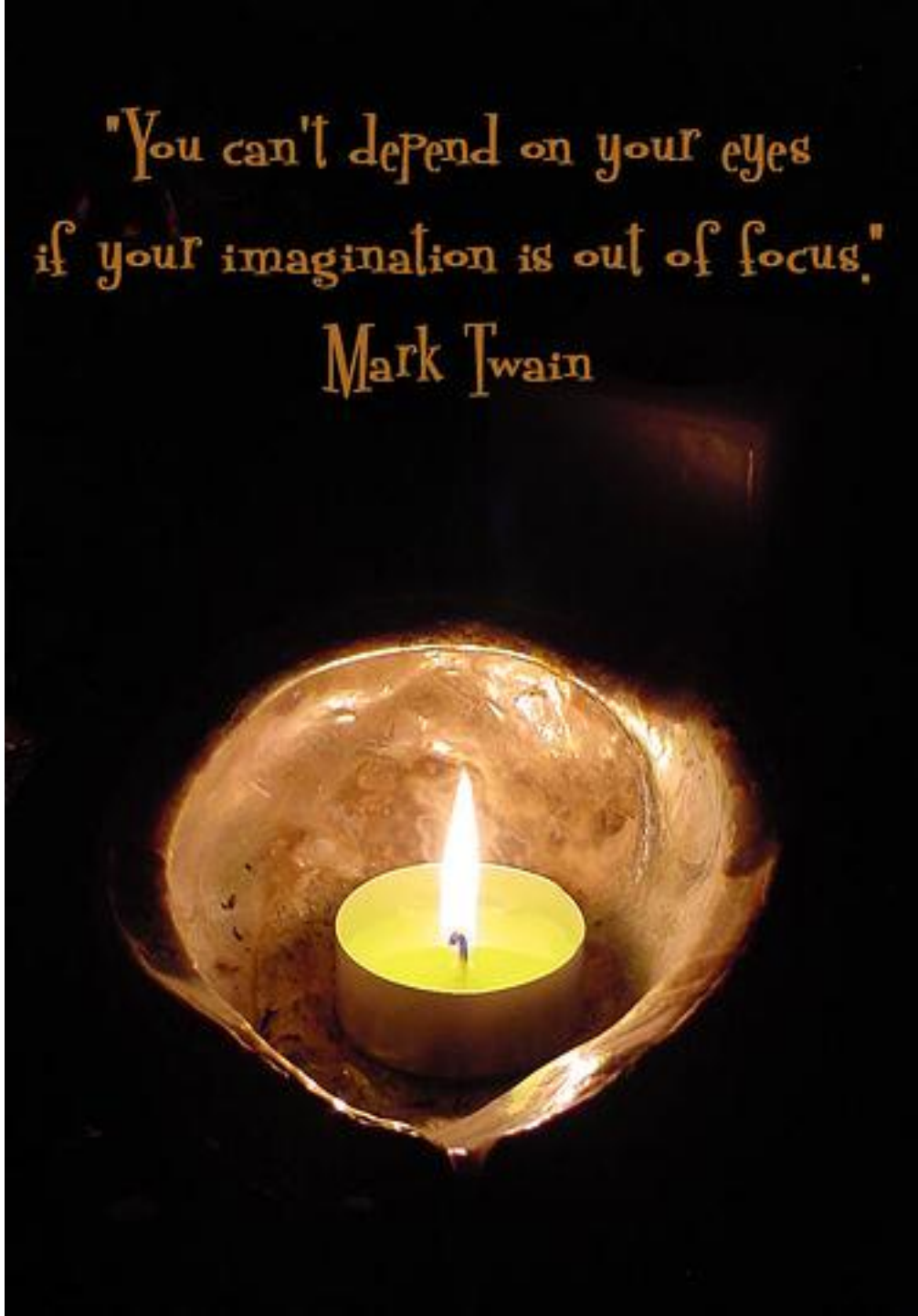
Craft

- Focussing on the sound, look and feel of the words…record writing and really listen!
- **Senses:**

- **Sound:** Euphony, discordance…the vowels and consonants
- **Sight:** Figurative devices
- **Feeling:** Nuances

Craft

- **Spotlighting:** the word and sentence level
- Lexical density
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- **Structure:**
- Purpose and audience
- Form
- Syntax and paragraphing
- Framing devices

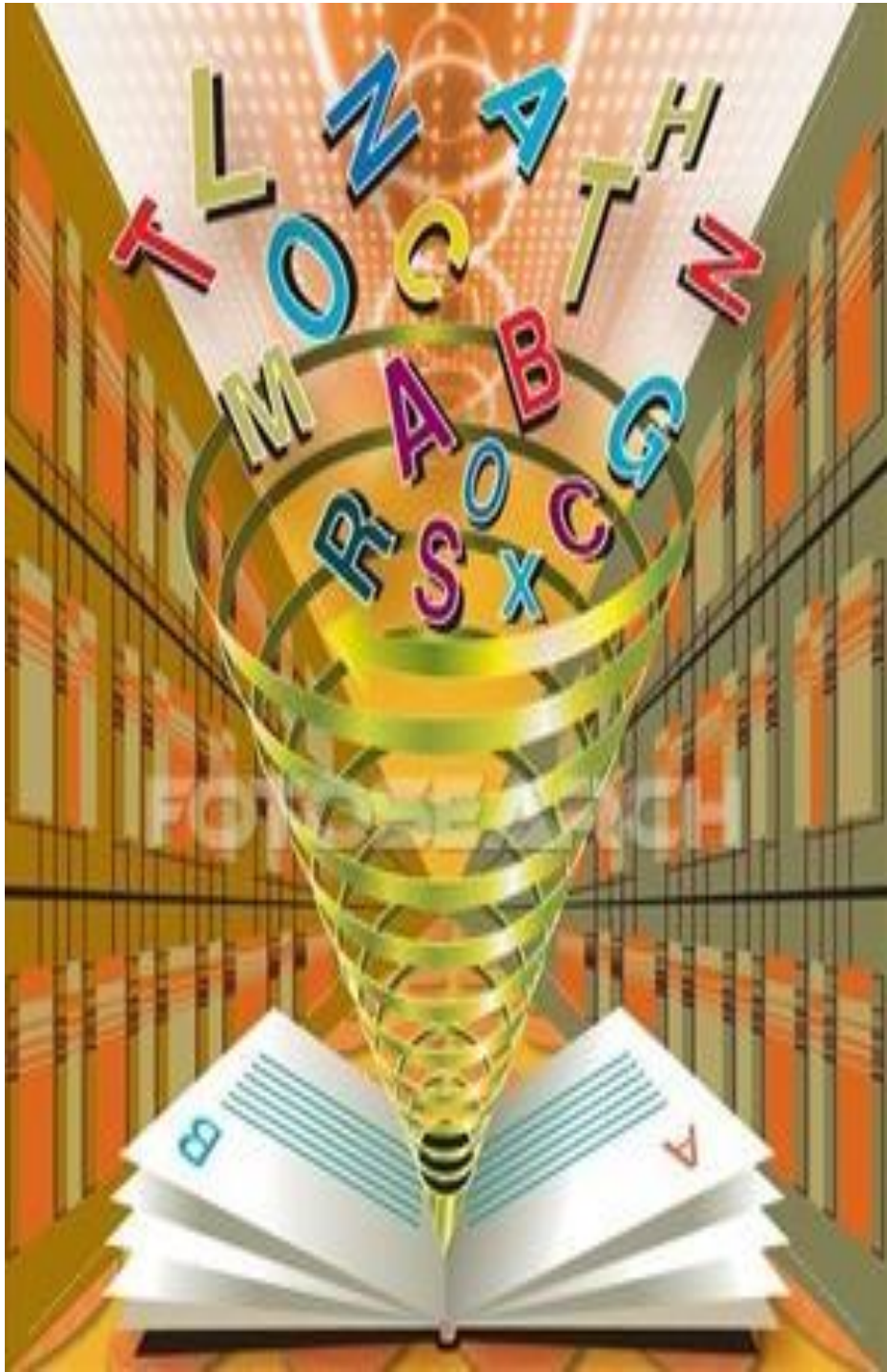


Vocabulary

- Range & precision of language choices
- Verbs are the powerhouse of writing
- Effective figurative and sound devices
- Colourful adverbs and adjectives
- Symbolism

Vocabulary

- Glossary for each text type and genre
- Metalanguage
- Analysing critically language usage in texts
  Tone charts
- Words for ‘said’
- Visuword: http://www.visuwords.com/
- Word replacements in a sentence



Grammar

- Verb agreement
- Tense
- Nominalisation: Renders writing more sophisticated
- Adjectivous!
- Syntax: Adding phrases and clauses, such as appositive phrases

Grammar

- Recording written work and listening for the discordance.
- Online tools: http://www.cybergrammar.co.uk/index.php
- Grammies!
- Replacing adjectives with verbs

Craft: Syntax

Sentence building

- Simple sentences that are enriched by adding more layers.
- Begin with an article, subject and a verb. *The rain fell.*
- Add an **adjective** and an **adverb**. *The heavy rain fell incessantly.*
- Add **prepositional phrases**. *In the middle of the day, the heavy rain fell incessantly onto the steaming streets.*
- Add an **appositive phrase**. *In the middle of the day, the heavy rain, seemingly angry with the people rushing to shelter, fell incessantly onto the steaming streets.*
- Add a **subordinate clause**. *In the middle of the day, the heavy rain, seemingly angry with the people rushing to shelter, fell incessantly onto the steaming streets, as the sun rays peaked through the clouds.*
- Add a **triad of absolute phrases**. *In the middle of the day, the heavy rain, seemingly angry with the people rushing to shelter, fell incessantly onto the steaming streets, as the sun's rays peaked through the clouds, sparkling in the puddles, dancing on the drenched footpaths, disappearing behind heavy clouds.*

Craft: Syntax

Image Palette: Provide a list of prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses and ask the pupils to select at least six to create an original description.

Prepositional Phrases	Subordinate Clauses
during the night	because the waves were frightening
on an empty beach	as he walked towards the shoreline
behind the sandhills	when the sun set
like a lost gull	although he had been warned
out of breath	Unless he could reach the shore

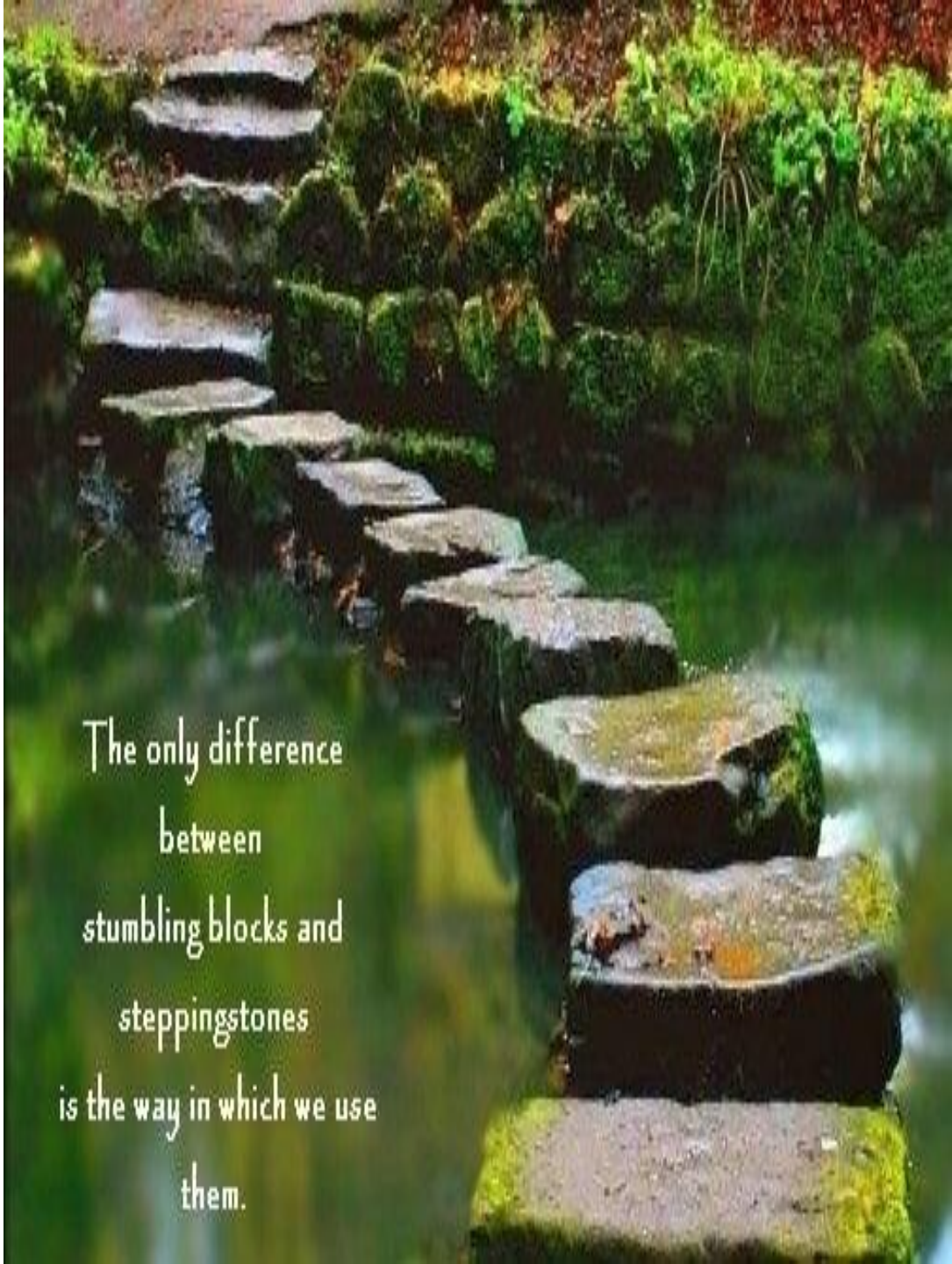
Craft

- **Sentence imitation:** Match the shape and word order of original sentences.
- **Skeleton stories:** Add ingredients
- **Image palette:** Provide a list of prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses
- **Cumulative sentences:** Independent clause that can be placed anywhere in a sentence and its accumulated modifiers
- **Phrase writing activities:** Describing family, self or friends using prepositional, appositive, gerund and participle phrases.

Generation and Selection of Ideas

Ideas

- Sharing rich and engaging texts with the pupils.
- Sentence of the week: A different purpose each week.
- Listening to audio recordings and delighting in the use of language.

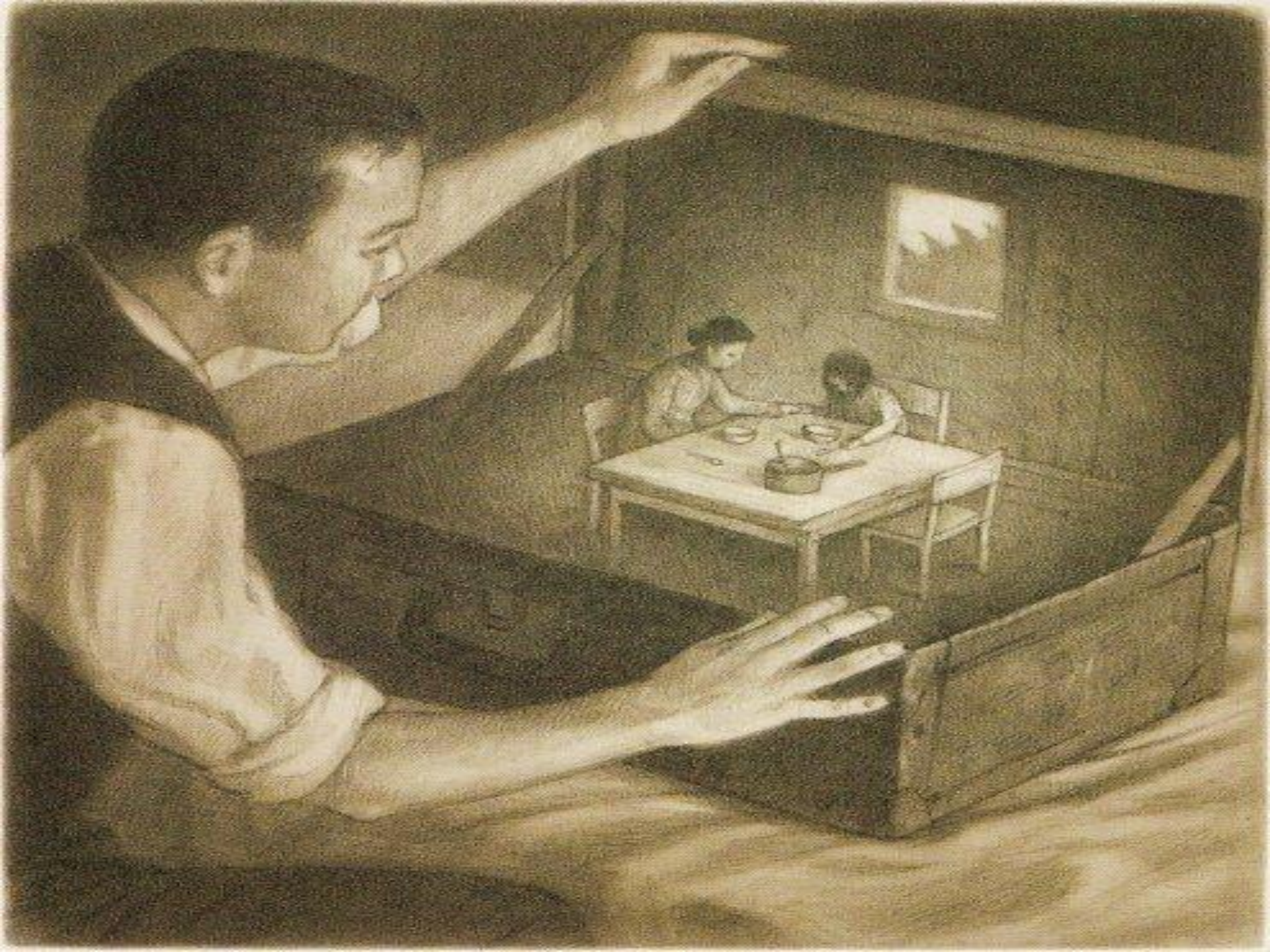


An easterly wind spikes out across the broad lagoon flattening the sea and running rashes across it in cold gusts. Under the sun the water shows its mottling of deeps and shallows, black and turquoise, reef and sand, dark and light, its coming and its going. The blunted swell butts against the barrier reef in feeble lines that lie down before the wind. Way out, the horizon looks like a ripsaw. At first glimpse of the Indian Ocean I stop running and feel the relief unwinding in my chest, in my neck and shoulders. Dinghies twist against their moorings. Gulls scatter before the blur of my insane kelpie. Two days off the plane, I am finally home.

Ideas

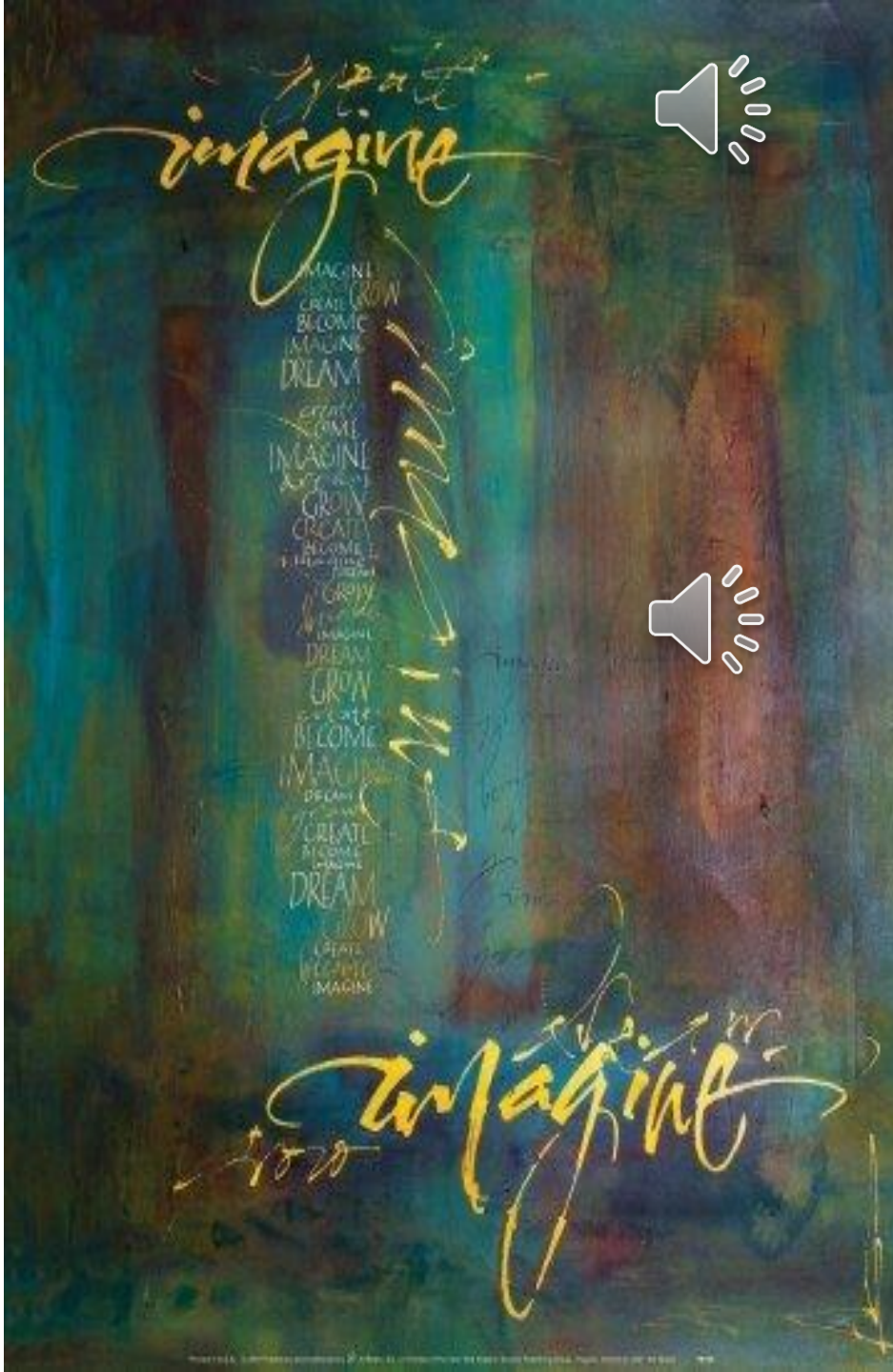
- Mystery Bag: Using different objects to spark ideas
- Through my window
- World through the eyes of a small creature

Images to Provoke Writing



Music to Inspire

- Pupils close their eyes and listen to the music
- They write down as many words as they can to describe what they hear and how they feel.
- They then eliminate words and begin to shape a poem or a narrative.



Films to Inspire

- Movie Trailers
- Vancouver Film School
- YouTube clips
- Movie Posters
- Australian Screen: http://aso.gov.au/titles/alpha/A/

Ideas

- Where does it take them?
- What do they see and hear?
- What surrounds them?
- Describe their emotional response?

Drama

- **Props:**
- A roll of Aluminium Foil: Can be moulded into pieces of jewellery, armour, or can turn someone into a robot.
- Several pairs of Sunglasses and Eyeglasses- A pair of glasses will help an actor get into character more easily, and will also cause one to gesture more meaningfully if he is holding it.
- A Mirror- It could be used for writing a story about alter egos or a journey to another place.
- Puppets
- Hats- e.g., a bowler, a beret, a beanie with a spinner on top, a big floppy lady's hat, and a fedora.

Drama

- A piece of fabric: ‘What could this piece of fabric be?’

- Superman cape
- Magic carpet
- Flag
- Picnic blanket
- Dog’s leash
- Invisible cloak
- Magician’s cloak

Activity 1: Modelling

- Fast write about a special place or person.
- Share the writing and discuss how you feel about writing.

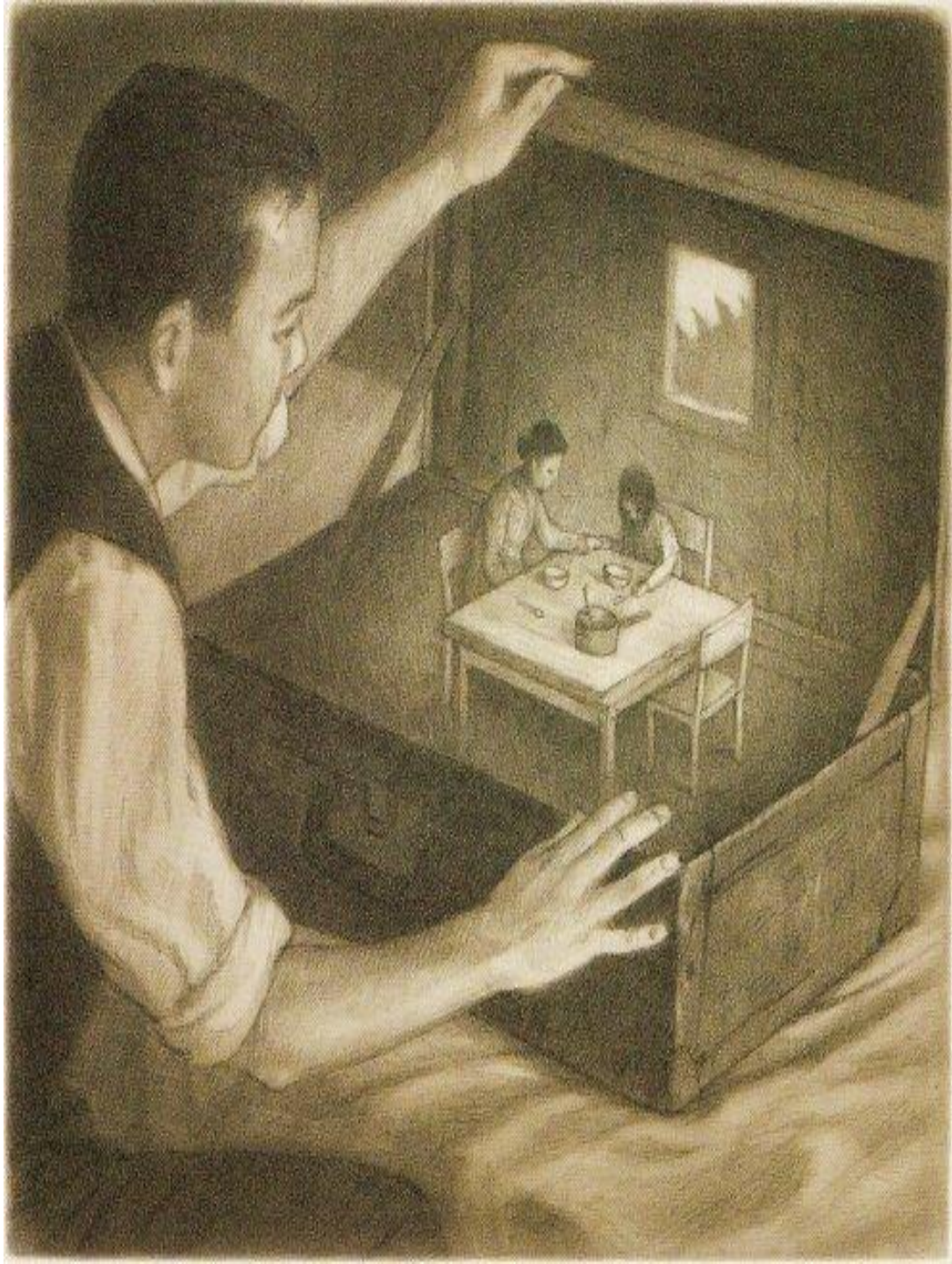
Development and organisation of ideas

Personal Recounts

- The basic recount consists of three parts:
  - the setting or orientation - background information answering *who? what? when? where? why? how?*
  - events are identified and described in chronological order.
  - concluding comments express a personal opinion regarding the events described
- Temporal conjunctions:
- Past Tense
- Personal pronouns

Personal Recounts

- *'The writing and representation of personal recounts allow pupils to retell and reflect on their experiences and past events.'*
- Authenticity
- Voice
- Celebrating heritage and culture



Strategies

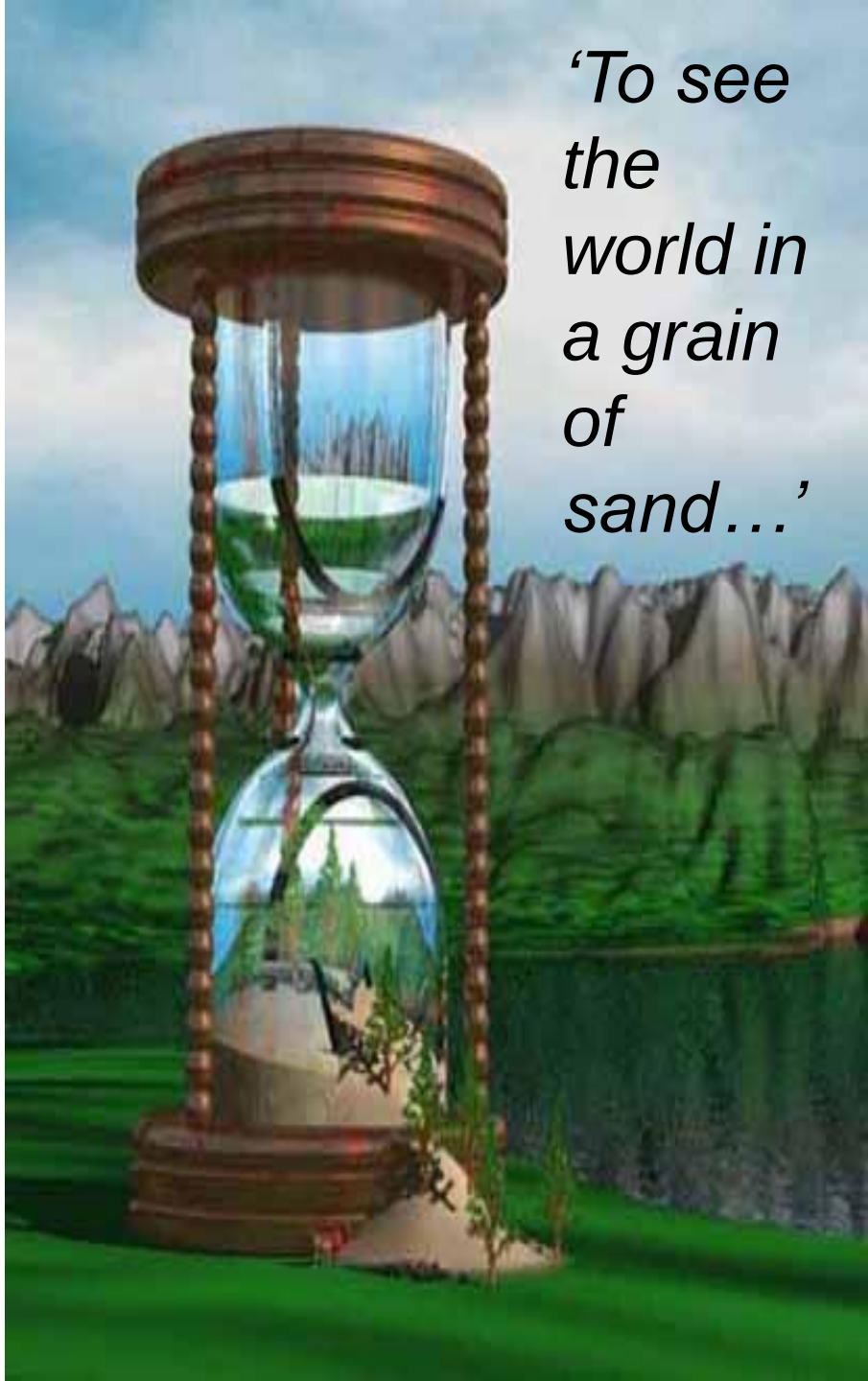
- Factual recounts: On the spot school reporter for class newspaper or blog.
- Recording memories
- Journal writing every day
- Kaleidoscope of impressions
- Word bank and clines

Strategies

- Interviewing family members
- Family photographs
- Special object such as a teddy bear, trophy, etc.

Poetry

- *'The writing and representation of poems allow pupils to express their feelings and thoughts imaginatively and to experiment with language.'*
- Distillation of language focuses pupils on the craft of writing!
- Sound and rhythm of words demand attention
- Haiku
- Found poems



Haiku Competition

Death crawls on the shore
A million eyes freeze, time stops
A thousand white cranes

Tsunami brings death
A mother cradles dead child
Rising sun brings light.

Golden sun retreats
Superpower sent crashing
End of an era.

Among the fallen
Lay silent all their children
The rising sun sets.

Waves crash through my home
Chaos and fear around me
Where is my brother?

Tsunami sweeps swift
Inland, shattered hearts lose hope
Only to emerge

Activity

Compose two haikus in response to a situation that was life changing. The first haiku is your initial emotional response. The second haiku reflects the insight you gained.

- Three lines
- 5, 7, 5 syllables
- Unrhymed

The Craft of Composing a Narrative

Explicit & Systematic Teaching

- Explicitly teach all aspects of a narrative
- Zoom into the word and sentence level
- Using short, timed activities
- Listening to the sound of the writing
- Peer and self marking
- Quality feedback

Features of a Narrative

- Audience
- Genre
- Structure
- Ideas
- Character
- Setting
- Vocabulary
- Syntax
- Cohesion

Activities

- Using writers to model effective writing: Extracts from novels: http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/vintage/offthepage/extracts.htm
- Flash fiction with a motif and extended metaphor.
- Focus on the idea first through images or quotes and then planning the narrative using a mind map.
- Starting in the middle of the action focusing on the verbs.
- Peer and self editing through a wiki or blog or insert comment in Word.

Structure

- **Organisation of a narrative:** orientation, complication, resolution, coda
- **Cohesion**
- **Sophisticated:** flashback, different perspectives, circular, parallel, stream of consciousness, moral, reflection

Activities

- Mind maps to plan for a narrative: Inspiration or Kidspiration (http://www.inspiration.com/); Webspiration: http://www.mywebspiration.com/ ; Freemind: http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download
- Flash fiction
- Twitter texts
- One sentence narratives

Activities

- **Flashback:** Start at the end and show what has led to this moment. Get the pupils to begin a narrative with the conclusion and write backwards.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** A story told through two or more characters. Get the pupils to write in pairs writing as the same character but with an altered perspective, such as a hero transformed into a villain.
- **Multiple Narratives:** Different stories connected by a theme or a motif, such as: survival. The pupils could work in groups of three. Each pupil could write in a different time period but their stories are connected by the theme of survival.

Activities

- **Pastiche:** Include a range of text forms such as: a narrative, newspaper clippings, a text message or MySpace posting. Scavenger Hunt on the net: Pupils have 10 minutes to find on the internet unrelated items such as: a headline, an image, a blog posting and an advertisement.
- **Circular Structure:** A story starts at a specific moment in a story, flashes back to explain the lead up to this moment, and then finally returns to the original specific moment. Pupils are given a scene such as: Watching a game show on television or swimming at the beach. They have to begin and end in this same place.

Setting

- Development of a sense of time and place
- Focus on **showing** not telling through imagery appealing to the senses especially sound, colour, touch and smell, strong verbs, contrast, and a variety of sentence structures.
- Atmosphere
- Colour
- Symbolism
- Genre
- Authenticity
- Detailed descriptions
- What if question

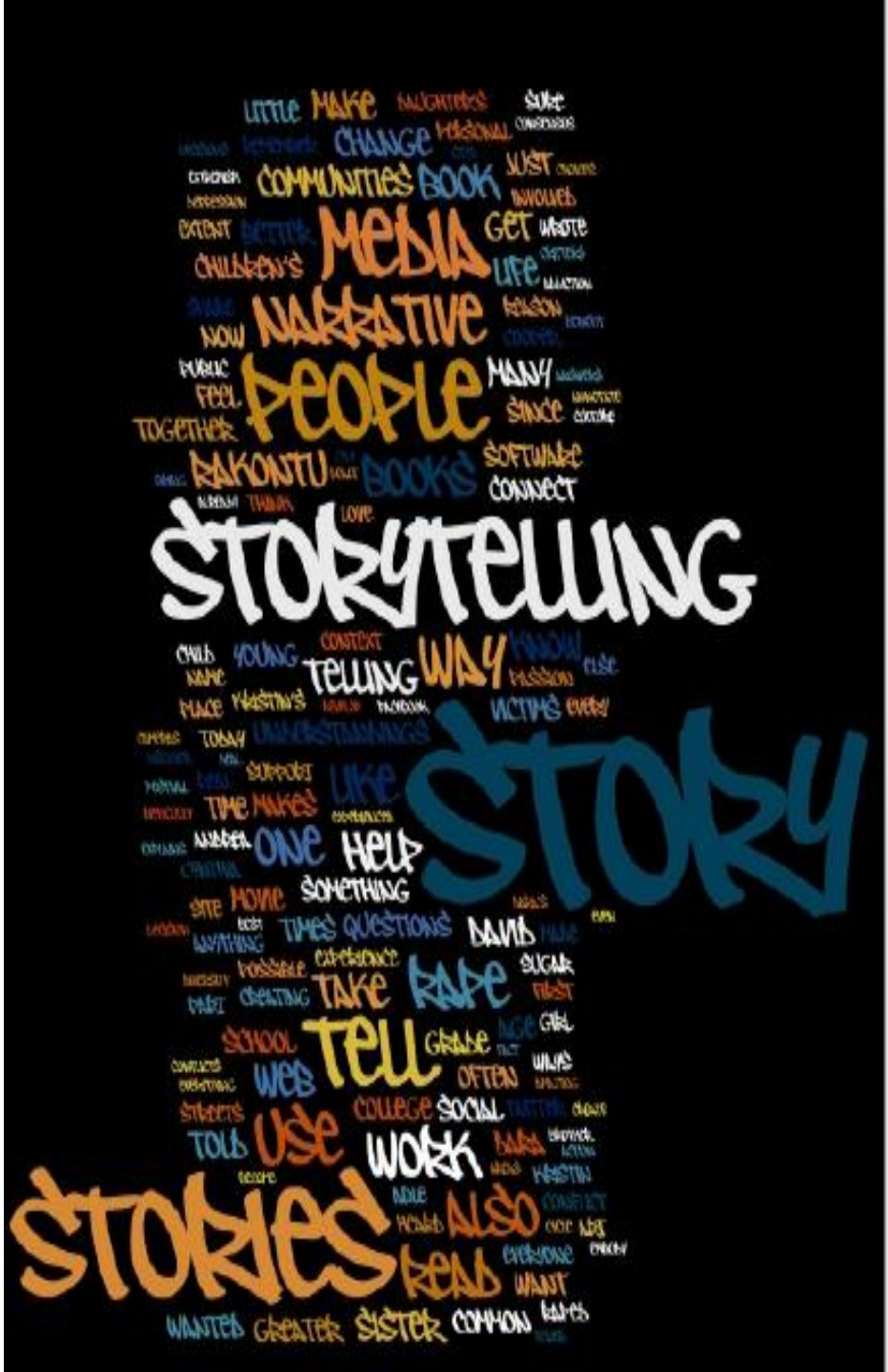
Ideas

- **Creation, selection and crafting**
- **Sophisticated:** world view, maturity, extended metaphor, satire, motifs

Activities

- Newspaper headlines
- **Metaphors:**

- Give pupils a list of common nouns and abstract nouns. Pair them together to create metaphors
- E.g. Scarf with anger, train with fear…



Characterisation

- Idiosyncrasies
- Talismans
- Complexity
- Perspectives and values
- How they move and act in the setting
- Dialogue and voice
- Relationships
- Actions and consequences

Activities

- **Podcasts:** Short extracts from narrative to ‘test’ the authenticity of the voice.
- Mirror image
- Extracts from texts: Interrogating the character
- Hot seating
- Role playing
- Pictures: People at a party
- Park Bench: one person decides the character for both participants. The other participant has to react to this while trying to determine their character.

Dialogue

- A conversation without dialogue.
- Viewing film without sound and adding the dialogue.
- A situation, such as an argument between two people acted out without words.
- pupils listen to the conversation and then add the words.

Dialogue

- **Build your wild self**: http://www.buildyourwildself.com/ - create a half-human half animal character and download them so that they can become the main character in a narrative or blog story.
- **Voki:** http://www.voki.com/ - create an avatar for a blog story or pupils can play with the crafting of a character. The pupils can add setting, clothing and even record their character's voice.

Colour the Writing

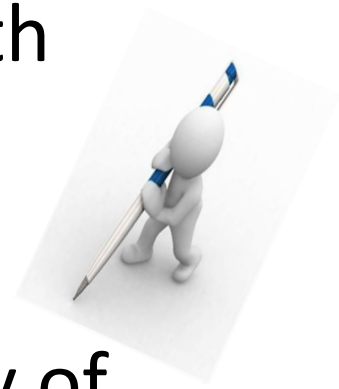
- **Synaesthesia:**

- Colour is attributed to sounds, odor to colours, sound to odours, etc
- Bruno Schulz's *Street of the Crocodiles*: *'Adela would plunge the rooms into semidarkness by drawing down the linen blinds. All colors immediately fell an octave lower the room filled with shadows, as if it had sunk to the bottom of the sea and the light was reflected in mirrors of green water.'*

Paragraphing & Sentences

Paragraphing:

- **Segmenting of narrative**
- **Sophisticated:** Deliberately drives the pace, topic sentences, varying paragraph length such as a single sentence paragraph



Sentences:

- **Sophisticated:** lexical density and variety of beginnings and length, such as: complex, simple, compound sentences

"Go! Go! Go!"

We surge as a single might, like a vast wave crashing and consuming the jagged rocks in our path.

We burst into the shattered remains of the building with sharp blasts of our guns, and rapid fire commands.

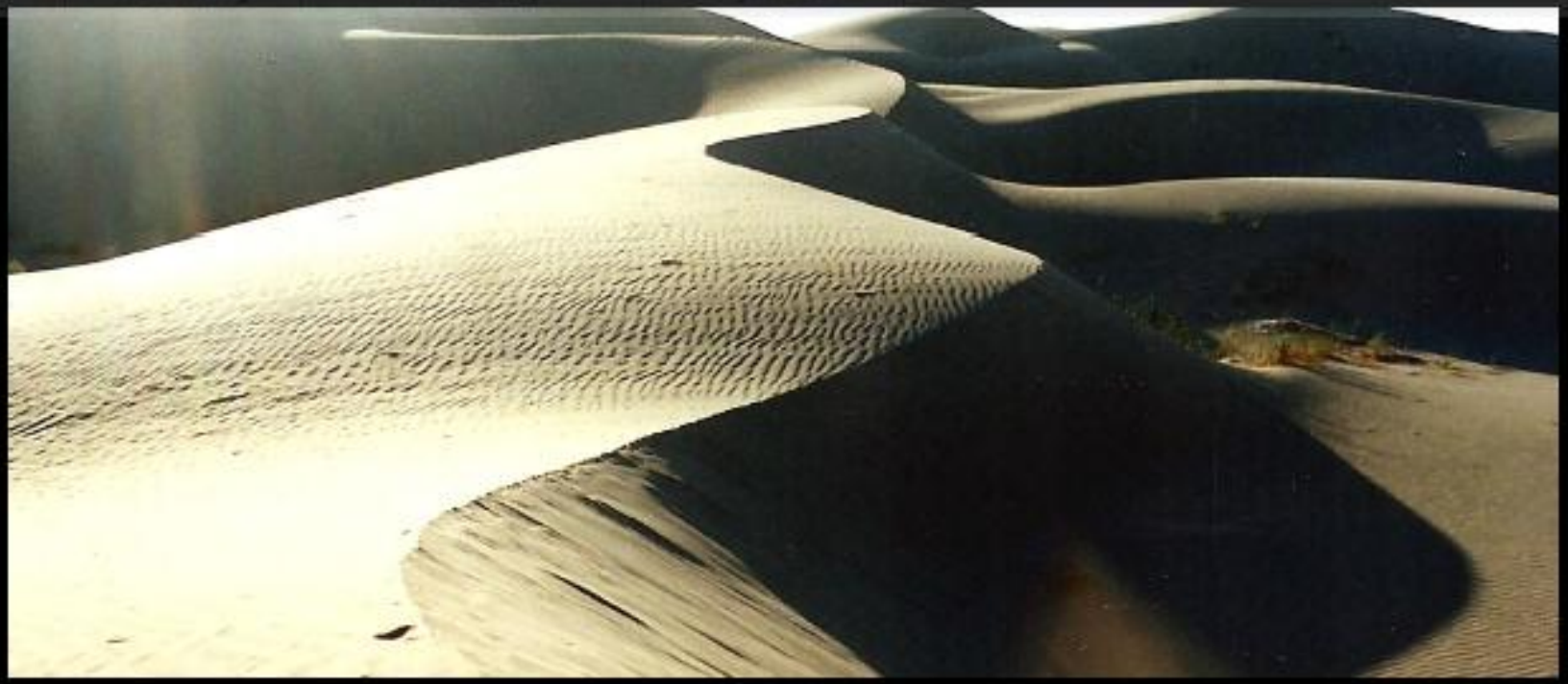
Heaving forward, our unit seeks to quench a relentless thirst and soothe parched mouth and throat from the bitter taste of the enemy.

The force of our tidal current exhumes all in its wake, and I batter down the final door to this humble habitat of a once-sparse existence.

I gasp for precious breath as the drowning sound of silence pulls me deeper into it's airless void.

My eyelids blink, a camera's shutter, intent on capturing various angles of the scene, reporting details to a brain too young and unprepared to absorb the horrific content of the news.

Stark reality slowly seeps into the crevices of my mind...
Awash in blood and gore before me, the disfigured remains of a young family.
Reduced to mere detritus spewed out in the wake of our flawed and futile mission.



I surface to find I am cast adrift. With newborn ears, I hear the cold and callous chatter of voices indifferent and unmoved by the carnage.

Dazed, I drift away from their mocking brutality, leaving them to scavenge through the meager belongings of a family devoured by man's cruel nature.

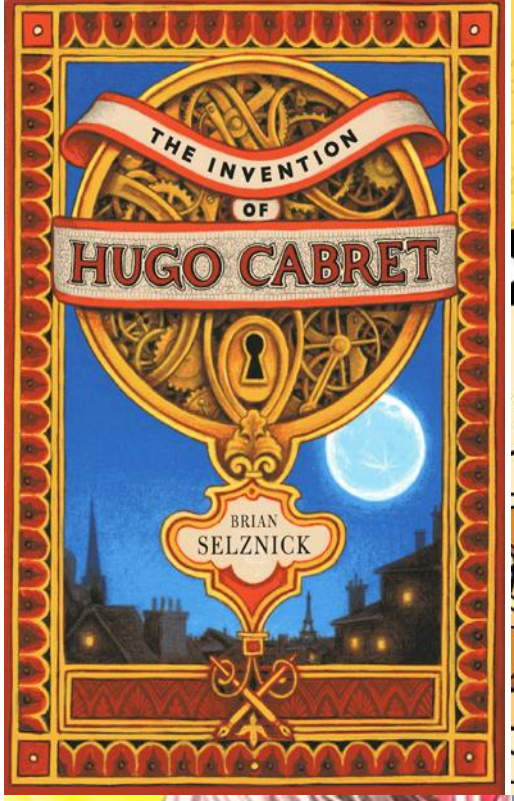
I'm just a boy.
A warm zephyr gently embraces me, whispering promises to carry me home, to carry me back into the safe arms of my childhood innocence.
I willingly accept the offer, and float away into night.

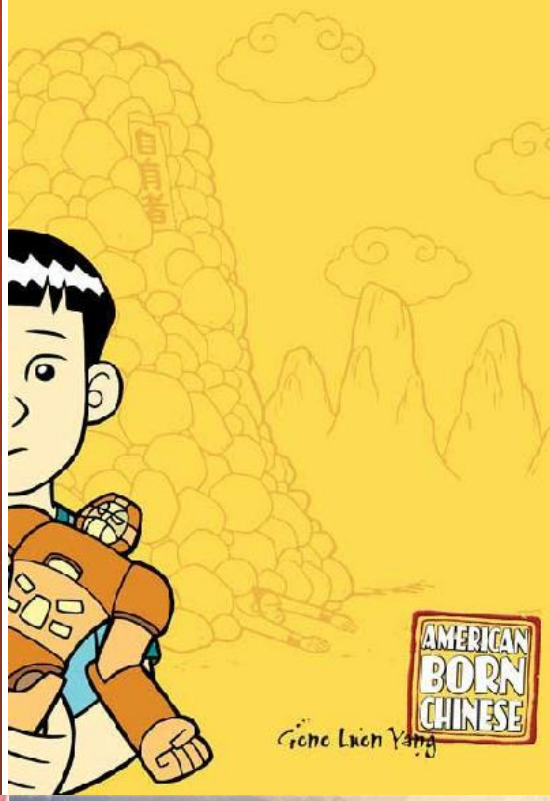
Day 2: Improving Writing

Day 1 Questions

Question 1

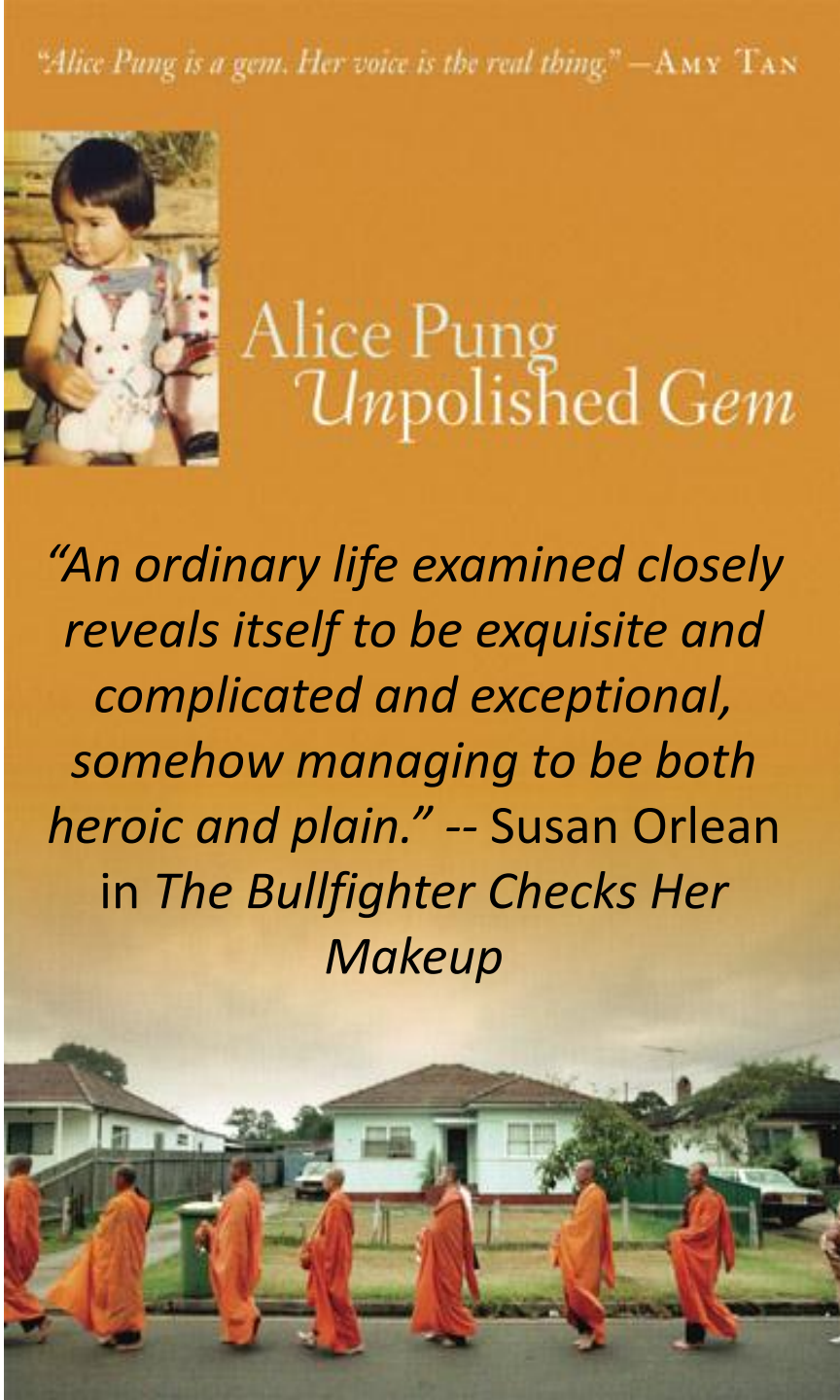
- **Graphic Novels?**
- *American Born Chinese* (Upper)
- *Kite Runner* (Older)
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*
- *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (Upper)
- *Manga Shakespeare series*
- *Artemis Fowl: The Graphic Novel*
- *Amulet: Book One—The Stonekeeper*
- *Coraline*





Question 2

- **Teaching creative non-fiction?**
- Weaves the writer's experience with the information of the text: memoirs – writer part of the story
- Build on personal recount to include dialogue and events that happened at the time.
- Faction: Taking an historical event and creating a narrative that has footnotes. Could be a digi-text with original photographs and footage from YouTube.
- Autobiography of the not so famous!
- Blogs
- Feature articles
- Documentaries
- Ballads
- Alice Pung – *An Unpolished Gem*
- *The Hare with Amber Eyes*



Question 3

- **Building vocabulary of reluctant readers?**
- Glossary for every new topic in room and given to pupils – bookmarks!
- Extracts from quality texts
- Spotlight on improving sentences
- Visuword
- Word of the day!
- Wordle
- Word webs
- Teacher's vocabulary usage
- Immersion in sophisticated texts

Question 4

- How do we make good readers good writers?
- A pupil's literacy development is dependent on this interconnection between reading and writing.
- Reading for meaning
- Teaching explicitly how to recognise, analyse and evaluate quality texts.
- Genre studies

Question 5

- **How do you have no closure in a narrative?**
- Notion of closure refers to the sense of finality
- A character who has issues
- Dramatic irony
- Showing not telling
- Pathetic fallacy: a storm building in the distance
- Cliff hangers!

Question 6

- Providing feedback with many classes?
- Provide strategic feedback that moves learners forward. Target and assess one or two aspects of the writing.
- Activate students as learning resources for one another through peer-assessment.
- Activate students as owners of their own learning through self-assessment.

Question 7

- Finding time to do all this?
- Tight deadlines and high expectations
- Home learning
- Spotlighting: Small, chunked tasks that are focussed and strategic.
- Writing every morning for a short time for a range of purposes and in a variety of forms.

Question 8

- Building world knowledge for expository writing?
- Action or inquiry based research: posing question, collecting evidence and presenting findings.
- Learning objects developed by the pupils.
- Challenges: 60 second experts!

Examples of Texts

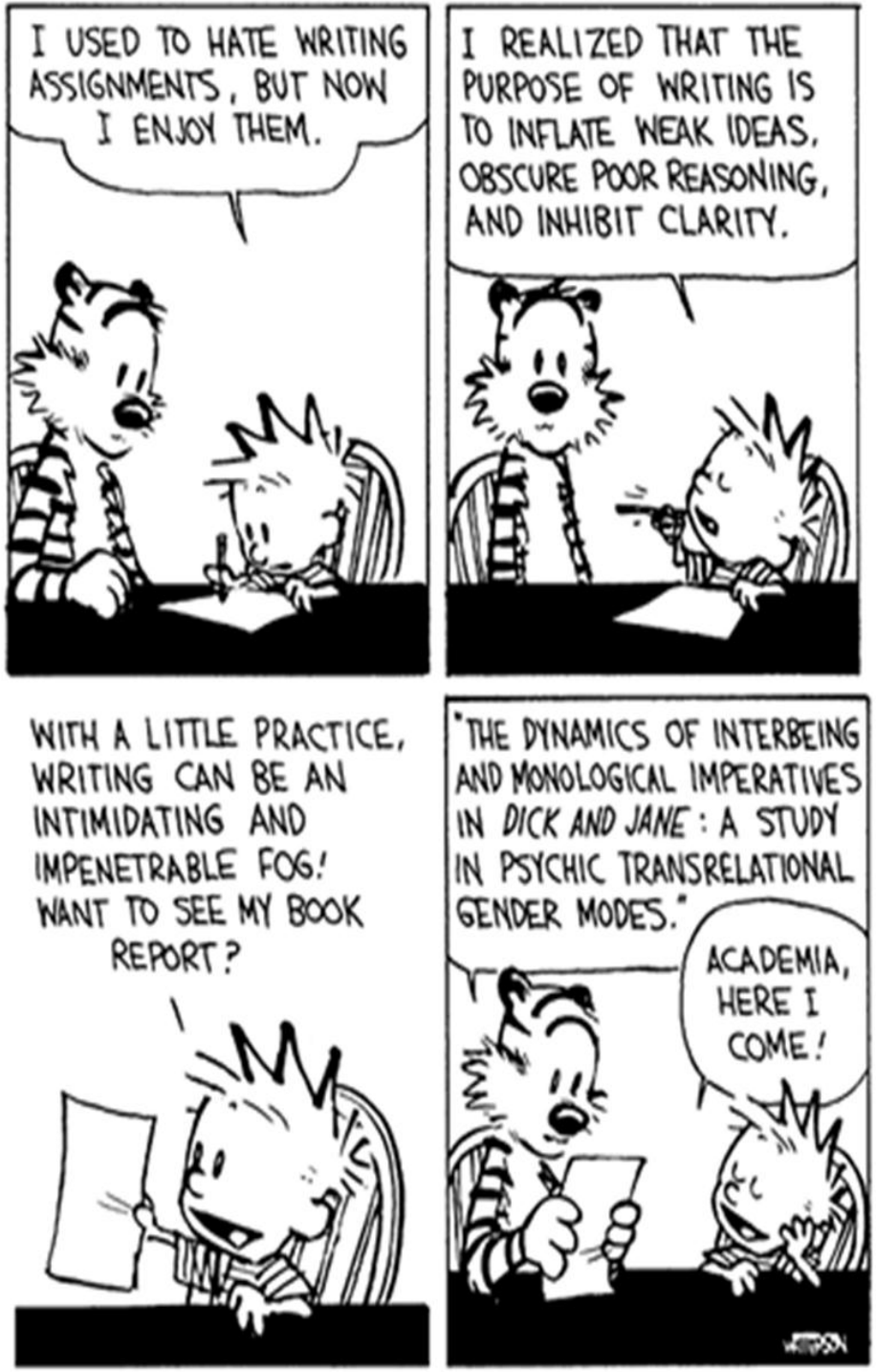
- Power Point
- Dystopian Movie
- Choose your own adventure
- Enter stage left the fool

Persuasion

Exposition

Exposition

- *'The writing and representation of expositions allow pupils to present, explain and justify their point of view or position on an issue/ situation or a proposed action, so as to persuade the reader to accept the point of view/ position/ proposed action.'*
- Clarity and cohesion
- **KISS theory**
- Thesis or line of argument or point of view with at least two supporting arguments
- Topic sentences
- Evidence



Exposition

- **Hypotheticals and debates**
- **Class elections**
- **State your position** – 30 seconds to construct an argument:

- Book vs. Kindle
- Air-conditioning vs. opening windows
- Driving vs. walking
- Plastic bags vs. green bags
- Writing vs. typing
- Bottled water vs. tap water

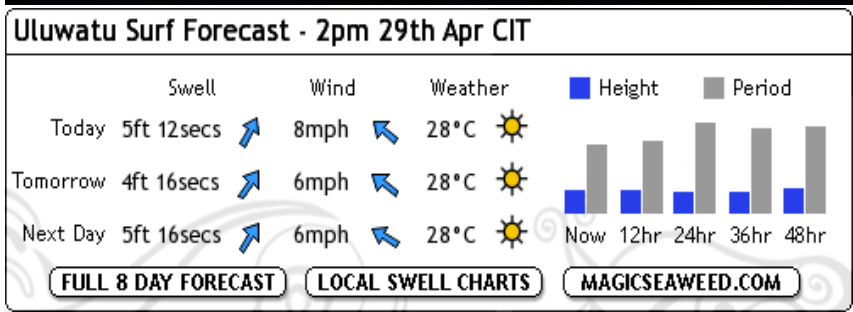
"When writing your essays, I encourage you to think for yourselves while you express what I'd most agree with."

Exposition

- Severn Suzuki's speech delivered at UN Earth Summit 1992 focusing on the ideas and the purpose of the speech: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZsDliXzyAY
- The Green's television advertisement election campaign: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gQVnIKDoOA
- EDF Energy Advertisements: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx3Y5RV9YR4&feature=related ; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7JMBa6h7Eo&feature=related

Exposition

- 60 second presentation on a burning issue
- Blog post or editorial
- **Websites such as:**
- Surfaid: http://schools.surfaidinternational.org/
- Amnesty International: http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/
- Protest poetry and songs: http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/poetry/poetry_against.html



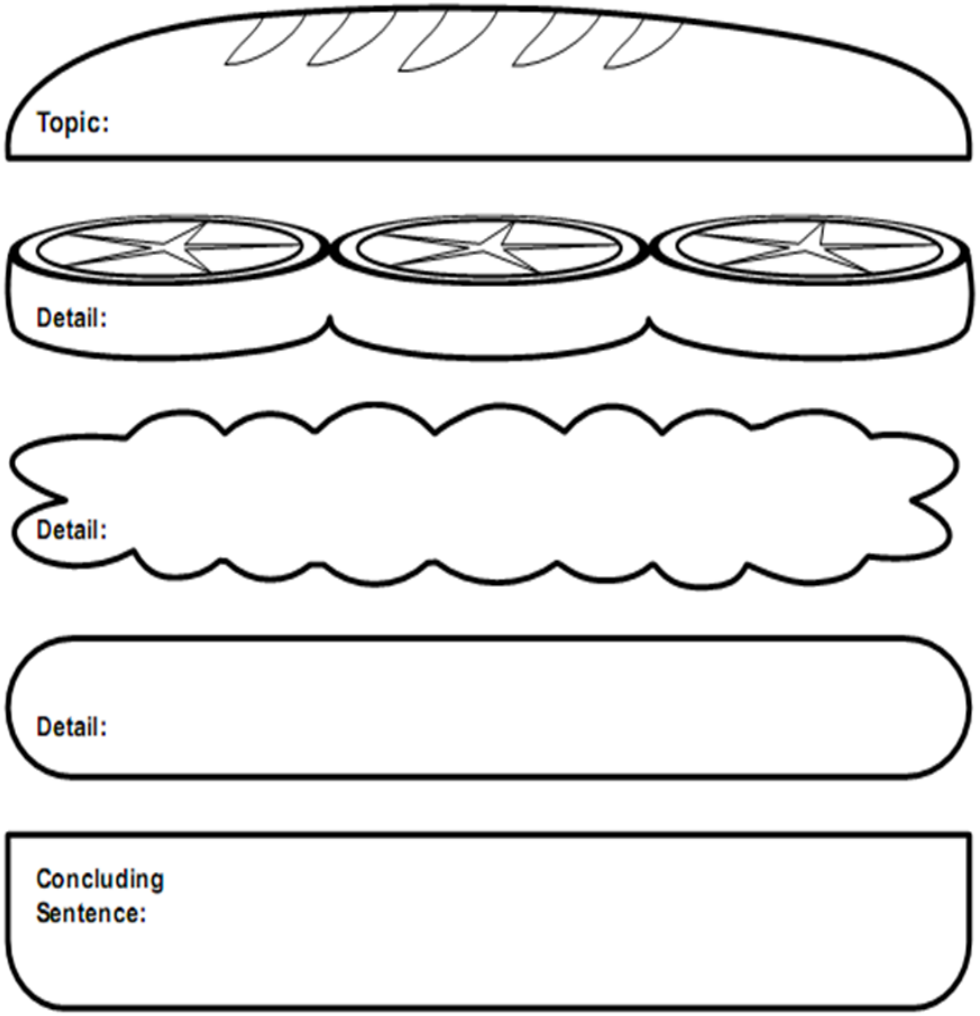
Exposition

- Timed introductions where time allowed decreases with each response.
- What? Where? When? Why? How?
- Comparison/Contrast columns
- Hamburger
- Imperative voice, anaphora, declarative statements….

Name _____ Date _____

Sandwich Chart

Write your topic at the top. Add details to the middle layers. Add a concluding sentence at the bottom.



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Exposition

- Editorial
- Letter to the Editor
- Advertisement campaign
- Poster
- Symposia
- Nominalisation (actions become things). E.g. ‘to pollute’ becomes ‘pollution’, ‘destroy’ becomes ‘destruction’

Exposition

- **Conceptual understanding**:

- The thesis or line of argument
- In response to the question
- The framework and drivers for extended responses
- Integrates the response
- Support and challenge

Developing a Thesis

- Strong opening paragraphs that introduce clear lines of argument or theses that directly address the question.
- A response that is driven by a thesis connected to the question. Each successive point must further the thesis through textual analysis and support. Support or even challenge then thesis through the analysis of the text/s.
- Precise topic sentences that are connected to and build on the thesis.
- Judicious textual support: Detailed, relevant examples from the text/s rather than spurious, shallow examples.

Developing a Thesis

- Judicious textual support: Detailed, relevant examples from the text/s rather than spurious, shallow examples.
- Supporting the analysis of language features with examples from the text/s and evaluating their impact on the responder. Never a shopping list of techniques!

Theses

- Overarching through the question to specific lines of arguments.
- Supporting the thesis with the reasons why the student has arrived at this point of view.
- At least two – three supporting arguments used to further the thesis that addresses the question in the essay.

Support

- Mind maps
- Comparison/contrast tables
- Generic responses and then spotlighting
- Timed opening paragraphs
- Topic sentences
- Connecting paragraphs
- Conjunctions

Importance of Feedforward

- *"An expert teacher, mentor or coach can readily explain, demonstrate and detect flaws in performance. He or she can also identify talent and potential, and build on these. In contrast, trial and error learning or poor teaching are less effective and take longer. If performance flaws are not detected and corrected, these can become ingrained and will be much harder to eradicate later. Learners who don't receive instruction, encouragement and correction can become disillusioned and quit due to lack of progress"* (Dinham, *Feedback on Feedback*, 2008).

Effective Feedback

- Precise
- Strategic
- Timely
- Frequent (Holmes & Papageourgiou, 2009)
- Encourages students to make the difference and do resubmits
- ‘Insert word’

The Power of Feedback in School Settings

John Hattie (2003)

Feedback directed to the 'self' (e.g.: "You are a great student"). 'Rarely does it enhance achievement or learning'.

Increases the ability to accommodate feedback and create internal feedback...

Level 3: Self-regulation

Relates to greater skill in self evaluation/self regulation

Feedback at this process level appears to be more effective than at the task level for enhancing deeper learning'

Level 2: Process

Aimed at the processes used to create the product/task

'Having correct information is a pedestal on which processing and self-regulation can be effectively built.'

Level 1: Task

'corrective feedback'

information focussed

Pedestal of feedback

Most feedback remains task focused

Knox Grammar School

Quality Feedforward

Effective feedback answers three questions:

- Where am I going? (the goals) Feed up
- How am I going? Feed back
- Where to next? Feed Forward

(Hattie & Timperely, 2009)

Peer Assessment

- *"When students are more active participants in the whole process, then feedback is likely to be most useful to students' learning"* (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).
- *"When students get to see other students' work it deepens understanding of the learning goals"* (Nicol, 2008)

'When learning something challenging we don't always get it right the first time. ***Errors are inevitable.*** *Indeed they are helpful; learning is a* ***trial and error process****, with success achieved by recognising errors and correcting them to obtain a closer approximation to the final goal. Students should not be crippled by errors, instead they must take* ***responsibility*** *for correction'* (Petty, 2009).

Journey to Self & Peer assessment

- Encourage peer discussion about what constitutes effective use of language.
- Invite diagnostic peer and self assessment by using a rubric and marking scheme that has been clearly explained to the pupils.
- Pairing and sharing
- Require pupils to design the marking criteria.
- Blogs and wikis

The short story 'War' attempts to provoke the reader into exploring the devastating widespread, and often unseen, consequences of war and violence. Emotionally, I hope the reader can briefly walk in the uncomfortable boots of a young soldier, who must confront moral dilemmas and suffer psychological trauma. The speaker is perpetually out of his depth, as he is situated in an environment that is unknown, uncertain, and has no previous experience to draw from. We can imagine the confusion and overwhelming sensory overload when we are out of our normal routines and culture, and must navigate new sounds, sights, smells, and tastes foreign to our own. The use of emotive language, imagery, and figurative language techniques are used to tap into similar feelings and emotions during the protagonist's constant struggle with his surroundings and state of mind.

The story, War, opens with the soldier and his unit battling to overcome the harsh environment that pose a risk to their physical health. Nature's extremes are personified. 'ferocious wave of sand and smoke' and a 'voracious beast of destruction' are two early examples of the extended metaphor, attributing animal characteristics to natural events. The relationship between two contrasting environments also acts as a motif of the ocean, recurring throughout the course of the story. Sibilance used is intended to make the reader feel discomfort, mirroring the state of the speaker. As with water, the "wave" sucks the lungs empty and then floods them with their matter – a sense of drowning, that hopefully the reader can relate to at

Activities 2 and 3

- **Sharing ideas and strategies:** In groups, share your approaches to improving the writing. Create a list of at least ten approaches.
- **Writing Lesson:** Design in a group an innovative lesson to improve writing or come up with one strategy you will use to enhance your teaching of writing.