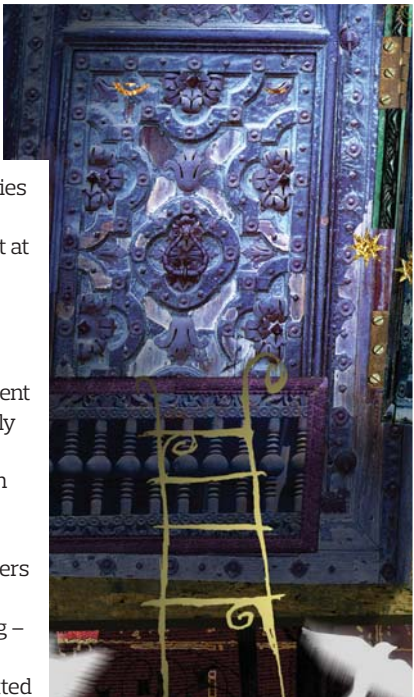




# GOOD READERS MAKE GOOD WRITERS

If pupils' ability to write doesn't match their ability to read, then creating better links between the two will see standards rise, says Gill Matthews in the first of three articles...



**W**hat can I do to improve writing in my school? We regularly get a high percentage of pupils achieving level 4 and above in their reading, but it's the writing scores which let us down.'

Is there a more common lament in primary schools? And what are we doing about it? A lot, is the obvious answer, but still the problem persists. In places where it does not, and writing scores rise, we are often left with the uncomfortable feeling that children are not becoming better writers – they are simply being given credit for learning a few basic tricks: inserting an adjective here, an adverb or three there, often neither needed nor appropriate.

Against this background, the Professional Literacy Company (PLC) developed Good Readers Make Good Writers, a course which trains teachers in creating not only interested, reflective readers but resourceful and committed writers.

This series of articles aims to show you how we do it and introduce you to some of the texts that we use.

### **Bring reading and writing together**

We know that good writers are invariably readers. We see it

when we read children's stories and discover words, phrases, whole sentences jumping out at us, giving clues to the books they are reading. We see it in the 'book language' they use when they write. And then there is that wonderful moment when a Y2 pupil unexpectedly writes a story in chapters because they've stumbled on *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark*.

So if this is what good writers do – experiment with ideas they find in their own reading – what can we do for those children who are not committed readers, or who read as readers only, not as writers too?

We need to bring together the teaching of reading and writing. Too often we keep them separate, focusing on discrete skills but neglecting the whole experience. We need to recognise that young writers will only get better if they regularly hear the rhythms and cadences of written language read aloud with verve and expression. If they just draw on the patterns and vocabulary of speech, their writing will always be limited and stilted. That's where shared reading and shared writing, using mentor texts, come in.

### **Choose better class books**

When we read to classes, we need to choose books that stimulate the mind and live in the memory. Serialising a book to a class went out of fashion for a while, a bit like role-play areas. When a resurgence took place, the books chosen were often tied in with topic choices or reflected limited knowledge of recent writing for children. No child should be deprived of Roald Dahl, and *Goodnight Mr Tom* is a great Second World War text, but there are other options.

We all have our particular favourites, but some books work better than others as mentor texts. To get started, try running a staff meeting when teachers (and TAs) nominate their 'austerity bookshelf': if you were limited to a choice of three books, which would you share with your year group? Once you've cleaned the blood off the staffroom carpet, you will have a shortlist which will form your spine of mentor

texts. As you refine your list, try to build in a sense of development, a range of genres and approaches to storytelling (use of time slip, shifts in point of view, formal and informal language) and some authors new to children (and teachers). This is the raw material young writers will be drawing on as they learn their trade.

When we read our mentor texts we should recognise the needs of readers who are meeting a text for the first time, and let them read as a reader. This means focusing on the experience, not stopping every few lines to ask comprehension questions or quiz on vocabulary. Let the words create pictures in the mind, place the reader at the scene, immerse them in the action. Periodically we can pause and talk about the experience – compare notes on what we see, hear, feel, think. Guided by Aidan Chambers' wise advice about likes, dislikes, puzzles and patterns, we can draw them into 'booktalk' which is engaging, stimulating and non-

