

Talk for Writing

At Cliftonville School, we use Talk for Writing in order to support our children's literacy skills. Talk for Writing was originally created by Pie Corbett and supported by Julia Strong and is powerful because it is based on the principles of how children learn.

Talk for Writing enables children to imitate the key language they need for a particular topic orally before they try reading it and analysing it. Through fun activities to help them rehearse the tune of the language they need, followed by shared writing to show them how to craft their genre, children are helped to write in the same style. It works well right through from the Early Years up to year 6 and beyond.

The Method

Talk for Writing is powerful because it enables children to imitate the language they need for a particular topic orally before they begin reading and analysing it and then writing their own version. Pie Corbett gives a brief explanation below of the basic principles. It builds on three key stages:

Stage 1 – Imitation

Stage 2 – Innovation

Stage 3 - Independent Application

The Imitation Stage

Once the teacher has established a creative context and an engaging start (the hook), a typical T4W unit would begin with some engaging activities warming up the tune of the text to help children internalise the pattern of the language required. This is often followed by talking an exemplar text, supported visually by a text map and physical movements to help the children recall the story or non-fiction piece. In this way the children hear the text, say it for themselves and enjoy it before seeing it written down. Once they have internalised the language of the text, they are in a position to read the text and start to think about the ingredients that helps make it work. Understanding the structure of the text is easy if you use the "boxing up" technique and then help the children to analyse the features that have helped to make the text work. In this way, the class starts to co-construct a toolkit for this type of text so they can talk about the ingredients themselves – a key stage in internalising the toolkit in their heads.

The Innovation Stage

Once the children have internalised the text, they are then ready to start innovating on the pattern of the text. This could begin with more advanced activities to warm up the key words and phrases of the type of text focused on so the children can magpie ideas. Younger children and less confident writers create their own text maps and orally rehearse what they want to say. The key activity in this stage is shared writing, helping the children to write their own by 'doing one together' first. This could begin with using a boxed up grid to show how to plan the text and turn the plan into writing. This allows the children to see how you can innovate on the exemplar text and select words and phrases that really work. Demonstrating how to regularly read your work aloud to see if it works is important here. This process enables the children to write their own versions through developing their inner judge when they

start to decide why one word or phrase is best. If, during this process, a teaching assistant (or able Key Stage 2 child) records words and phrases suggested on the flipchart, these can be put on the washing line alongside the shared writing so when the children come to write, they have models and words and phrases to support them. Throughout the shared writing, the children should be strengthening the toolkit so they start to understand the type of ingredients that may help. Once they have finished their own paragraph/s children should be encouraged to swap their writing with a response partner. Then with the aid of the visualiser, the whole class can also discuss some of the more successful work. Time now needs to be found to enable the children to give their own work a polish in the light of these discussions and perhaps to begin the dialogue about what works by writing their own comment on their work for the teacher to comment on.

The Invention/ Independent Application Stage

The teacher now has the opportunity to assess the children's work and to adapt their planning in the light of what the children can actually do. This stage could begin with some activities focussed on helping the children understand aspects that they were having difficulty with and should include time for the children to have a go at altering their work in light of what they have just learnt so they start making progress. This stage will continue to focus on the next steps needed to support progress so the children can become independent speakers and writers of their text type. Perhaps some more examples of the text are compared followed by more shared writing on a related topic and then the children can have a go themselves on a related topic of their own choosing. At the end of the unit, the children's work is published or displayed. The teacher will now have a good picture of what features to focus on in the next unit to move the children forward. It is important to provide children with a purpose for their writing so classroom display or some sort of publishing is useful.

Impact

Since using the Talk for Writing process at Cliftonville Primary School we have seen a huge improvement in the quality of the children's writing across the school which is evidenced at termly data collection weeks and Pupil Progress Meetings. We have seen reluctant writers and children whose first language is not English have the confidence to write for themselves.