BBC RADIO 2

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OXFORD
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500 WORDS

2019

Learning Resource Pack

In association with
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Calling all young writers

January truly is our favourite time of the year. Not only are the days getting longer and lighter but this is the month we launch another 500 Words competition and find out how wonderfully empathetic, ingenious and word-wizardly the children of the UK really are. Yes, BBC Radio 2's 500 Words, the UK's biggest story writing competition for children aged 5–13, is back. It's the competition that asks kids from all over the UK to send us a fictional short story no more than 500 words in length, no matter where they're from, what school they go to or how many stories they've written before.

Over the last 8 years almost 800,000 stories have been submitted, which equates to over 340 million words for the Oxford Corpus, the largest children's language database in English. Every one of these original stories helps the Oxford University Press to better understand how creatively children command their language to voice their concerns about the world, to share the mind-blowing worlds in their imagination, and to create characters that stay with us forever.

We know this year will be no different. From children who write regularly, to those who are tempted to pick up a pen or sit at a keyboard for the first time, this competition is open to all: they all have something to say and we can't wait to read it!

This learning resource pack has been designed to help children take those first steps. Each section focusses on one of the marking criteria so that children can explore, develop and improve on their ideas, knowing that the judges will be specifically looking at these areas – it is a competition after all!

You can also find helpful tips, sources of inspiration and even more writing resources in the 'Learn' section of the 500 Words website.

A huge thank you for getting involved in the competition so far and remember there is a story inside everybody! Don't forget to submit your pupils' entries online via the 500 Words website before 7pm on Friday 8th March.
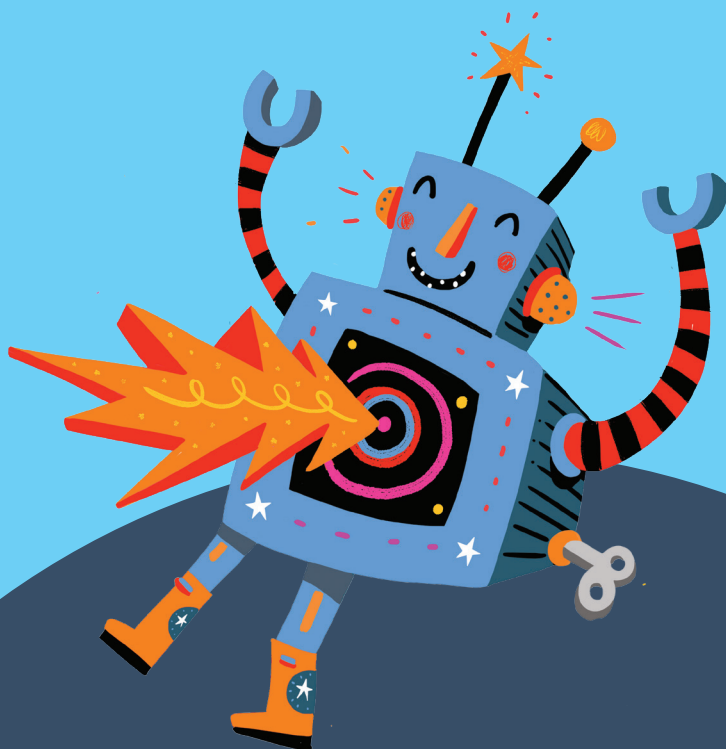
Good luck!

500 Words team

Calling all teachers, librarians and parents

Our volunteer judges are a vital part of the 500 Words process. As well as witnessing how imaginative and talented children are, each judge gets the chance to be at the Live Final – so why not give it a go?

To find out more and register, head to

bbc.co.uk/500words

Contents

Learning Resource Pack

★ Easy, quick ideas, especially for younger writers

★★ More ideas, especially for older writers

Originality

Some people say that every story has already been told… but our 500 Words writers know that's not true! Every year, they come up with wonderfully inventive and original stories that wow our judges. Use some of these activities with your class and tell them to let their imaginations run free and take us on an adventure.

Inspirational objects ★

Unusual objects can be a great source of story inspiration. Raid the store cupboard or get your class to bring in intriguing items from home. Anything from an old hat to a telescope will do the trick. Ask questions about the object to inspire different story ideas. What could it be used for? Who might be looking for it? What secret could it hold? Suggest different genres or types of story such as mystery or science fiction and discuss how the item might be used in this kind of story.

Facts into fiction ★ ★★

Fun facts from different school subjects can inspire astounding stories. Did you know a jumping flea can accelerate faster than a space rocket taking off into orbit? You could use this science fact to spark a story about an astronaut flea saving Tim Peake from bug-eyed alien invaders. See who can think up the craziest story idea inspired by the facts they find.

Headlines ★★

Real-life events can often spark great story ideas. Bring in a selection of newspaper reports and headlines. Ask your writers to read through these to find interesting details that could inspire an imaginative story. Why not take details from different reports to create a fresh and original story?
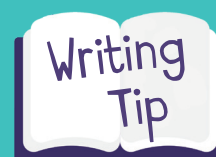
Idea generator ★ ★★

Sometimes it's the mix of ingredients that can give you a story idea that stands out from the crowd. Get your writer to choose different characters, settings and genres from the next page and mix them together. What kind of mystery would Sherlock Holmes solve on his visit to Hogwarts?

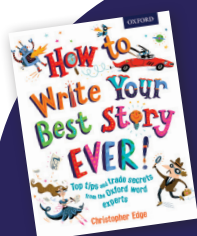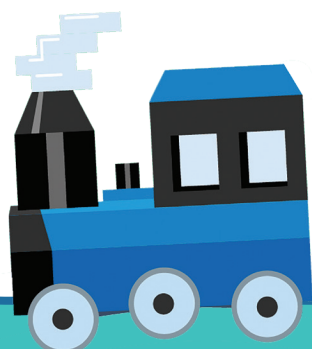For more story sparks, take a look at *How to Write Your Best Story Ever*.

Writing Tip

Frank Cottrell Boyce says…

"What could be more fresh and original than you? You are unique and amazing. So the more of you you put in, the more original your story will be."

Writing Tip

Malorie Blackman says…

"Unusual settings and scenarios help spark story ideas but so do unusual characters in everyday settings."

Did you know?

…in 2018 the word plastic and the damage caused by plastic pollution inspired many stories, and to fight against it, one writer even invented the Reverse-o-matic Pollutinator Ray Gun?

Story idea generator

Pick a type or genre of story, character and setting and put them together to think up a story idea. You can pick and mix from every category or even throw your own ideas into the mix.

Genre

mystery
romance
science fiction
horror
comedy
fantasy
historical
adventure
spy
animal

Character

superhero
King Henry VIII
hedgehog
vlogger
rapper
wizard
dinosaur
robot
secret agent
archaeologist

Setting

haunted house
Planet X
school
department store
zoo
desert island
mountain
castle
enchanted forest
city

Genre

_____
_____
_____
_____

Character

_____
_____
_____
_____

Setting

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Character

Every story needs a star. From famous footballers to pet hamsters and fictional superheroes, unforgettable characters make stories come to life. Use some of these activities with your class to help them to dream up some page-turning protagonists.

Instant impressions ★★

Writers can use adjectives to create an instant picture in a reader's mind. Create a list of different adjectives such as 'flashy', 'tattered' and 'chinless' and challenge your writers to choose three from your list to describe the lead character in their story. Alternatively, ask the class to create their own different lists of adjectives for heroes and villains. Remind your students not to scatter adjectives everywhere in their story but to use fun adjectives appropriately.

Get the profile ★ ★★

Asking questions about the characters in a story can give writers the answers they need to bring them to life. Challenge your writers to think about what a character is like and why they act the way they do. This can often help with plot ideas too! Get writers to ask each other questions about their character using the character profile on the next page.

The game of the name ★

Unforgettable characters need a memorable name. Suggest famous character names from fiction and ask the class to decide what type of story they are from. For example, would you expect to find a character called Eowyn Broadsword in a love story or a fantasy tale? Is this the kind of name you would give to a heroine or villain? Ask your writers to think about the type of story they are writing to make sure the character names they choose fit the bill.

Calling all **teachers**

Writing Tip

Charlie Higson says...

"Try to make your characters real; try to make them come alive on the page; try to make them people we'd like to know more about. Let us know what makes them tick."

Did you know?

...stories of women in history inspired young writers in 2018 to create characters like *Larry the Suffra-cat* who chains himself to a statue outside Parliament to campaign for votes for all animals?

Does your character have a favourite band?

Does your villain love ice cream?

Does your hero have a secret fear of spiders?

HOW TO BE A YOUNG #WRITER

How To Be A Young #Writer offers tips to help add depth to characters.

Character profile

Complete this character profile to collect ideas about the lead character in your story. Try to answer every question to find out what makes your character tick.

My character's name is: _____

Can you describe what your character looks like?

My character looks like: _____

_____

_____

Does your character speak or make any sounds?

My character sounds like: _____

_____

_____

What interests or pet hates does your character have?

My character likes/dislikes: _____

_____

_____

Does your character have a hobby? What do they do?

My character: _____

_____

_____

Where does your character live?

My character lives: _____

_____

_____

Does your character have a family?

My character has: _____

_____

_____

Plot

Great stories have page-turning plots that keep readers glued to their seats to find out what happens next. Use some of these activities with your class to help them to turn their brilliant ideas into a fantastic story with a beginning, middle and end, and maybe a twist or two along the way as well!

Story starters ★ ★★

Get your writers to think about the event that will kick-start the plot of their story. Throwing the reader into the middle of the action straight away is a great way to grab their attention. Ask your writers to pick the opening scenes of a favourite book or film and give it a twist to create a new plot and storyboard their own story. For example, what if Bilbo Baggins hadn't met Gandalf at the beginning of *The Hobbit* but Smaug the Dragon instead...

Obstacle race ★

Action drives the plot of a story forward. Pick a fictional character and give them a story starter such as Spiderman discovering a radioactive banana in his lunchbox. Pass the problem around the class, challenging one person to suggest how the fictional character would tackle the obstacle and then asking the next to invent a new obstacle to put in the character's path. See how quickly the action escalates!
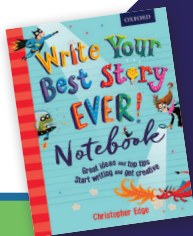
Story mountain ★ ★★

Creating a plot is like climbing a mountain – each event in the story should build on the one before. Get your writers to complete the story mountain worksheet on the next page to help them to plan their plots. Encourage them to think about the problems and challenges their protagonists will face.

The perfect ending ★★

The last lines of a story should pack a punch. List different story genres and discuss the different emotions each might evoke, for example, a reader of a horror story might feel nervous or uneasy if the story ends on a spooky scene. Ask your writers what emotions they want a reader to feel at the end of their story and challenge them to craft a final line that creates that feeling.

Build your own story in your very own copy of the *Write Your Best Story Ever! Notebook* and *My Best Short Story in 500 words*.

Writing Tip

Malorie Blackman says...

"Starting on a moment of change or conflict for your main character is a good way to get us straight into the story."

We VERY quietly made a plan, and we began our escape...we set up camp for the night at roughly 7:26pm. We set off in the morning, and the challenge ramped up about 6 levels.

(Hezen-5: On the Run, 2018)

Did you know?

...the world of gaming and fantasy combined in 2018 to create stories which had evil trolls and golden portal keys alongside levels, platforms and an electronic glitch?

Story mountain

Complete the story mountain to plan out the plot of your story. Start at the bottom with a dramatic opening and then work out the different twists and turns your plot will take until you reach the end!

Challenge

_____

_____

_____

3

Problem

_____

_____

_____

_____

2

Build-up

_____

_____

_____

_____

4

Problem solved

_____

_____

_____

_____

1

Beginning

The story starts with...

_____

_____

_____

5

Ending

_____

_____

_____

_____

Language

Every writer wants to find the perfect words to tell their story. Since the writer can only use 500 of them for this competition, it's important for them to make the best use of every one. Use some of these activities with your class to help them to choose words that will make their 500 Words stories sparkle in the reader's mind.

Striking similes ★ ★★

Share some of these similes from 500 Words stories and discuss the pictures they paint:

'as tall as a dozen giraffes standing on top of each other',

'each step I took crackled like bacon cooking in a pan full of oil',

'my mouth hung open like the gates of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory'.

Challenge your class to create their own striking similes using the worksheet on the next page.

Word inventors ★★

Blending different words together to create new compound words can add interesting ideas and characters to a story. For example, blending 'man' and 'suffragettes' creates 'manffragettes', while if you add 'water' to a 'yeti' you end up with a 'weti'! Challenge your writers to blend different words to create their own compound characters.

Synonym ★ ★★

Don't let your writers settle for the first word that pops into their head. Flick through a thesaurus to find better alternatives for overused words like 'big' and 'nice'. Pass this challenge round the classroom with each person having to find a synonym that's even better than the last, for example, 'big', 'enormous', 'gigantic', 'dinosaurian'…

Get gongoozling! ★

From 'squeegees' to 'widdershins', 'mulligrubs' to a 'gongoozler', get the class hitting the dictionaries to find out the meanings of some of these funny-sounding words! Challenge your writers to find their own funny words to weave into their stories. Could they fit a 'flibbertigibbet' into their story or find space for a 'jackanapes'?

Writing Tip

Francesca Simon says...

"Do have fun with language. Play around with it until you find the right word."

As he mused, he saw fireflies drifting in the night sky… as he drifted off to sleep…What the young boy did not realise was the fireflies were in fact burning embers from the floors below…His tower block was named Grenfell Tower.
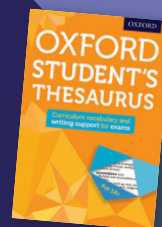
(Fireflies, 2018)

Did you know?

…the word unicorn appeared over 20,000 times in the stories in 2018 with a range of descriptive words associated with it, from magical and sparkly to majestic and magnificent?
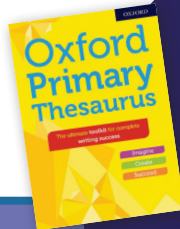
The *Oxford Primary Thesaurus* and *Oxford Student's Thesaurus* can help broaden vocabulary and discover interesting alternatives to more common words.

Striking similes

A simile is a way of describing something by comparing it with something else, using 'like' or 'as'. Using similes can help you to describe the scenes of your story in interesting and unusual ways. Complete the examples below to create your own striking similes. Try to choose unexpected words that will create an original picture in the reader's mind. Then create your own similes from scratch!

as _____
_____

soar like a
_____

as cunning as a
_____

like _____
_____

as dark as
_____

as easy as
_____

as sharp as a
_____

as tall as
_____

as _____
_____

eat like a
_____

like _____
_____

like a _____
in a china shop

as _____
as a feather

as fast as
_____

as _____
_____

as _____
_____

as red as
_____

as loud as
_____

like _____
_____

Enjoyment

The world is made of stories. Exciting stories, scary stories, thrilling stories, stories that make you cry and ones that leave you giggling so hard that your face hurts. The magic ingredient in all these types of stories is enjoyment. Use some of these activities to help your class create stories that will wow the judges.

Who's who? ★★

Get your class to think about who's telling their story. Invent a character and send them on a tour of the school. Challenge your class to describe the character's journey, sharing their thoughts and feelings about what they see. At key moments shout out a change of character and see how the story changes. You could switch from a fairy-tale princess to a secret agent or even an escaped dinosaur!

Twisty tales ★

Take some traditional story openings and give them a twist. How about starting a 'Once upon a time' story about a bogey that lives up a nose? Or change Little Red Riding Hood to Little Red Hiding Hoodie and make her the villain of the story? Perhaps you could give Rapunzel a smartphone or let Cinderella meet Luke Skywalker… Have fun twisting traditional fairy tales into stories that will surprise the reader.

Action and emotion ★ ★★

Can you show how you're feeling without saying a word? Challenge your writers to think about how a character's actions can reveal their emotions. Ask your class to pick an emotion from the worksheet on the next page and then mime an action that shows this emotion. Can the rest of the class guess how they are feeling?

Extreme writing ★ ★★

Escape from the classroom and try writing in different locations to get some fresh inspiration! From the playground to the sports hall, the local park to the library, see how a change of scene can inspire some fun stories. You could even cover the walls of the classroom with photos of different locations from Mount Everest to Mars for maximum inspiration.

Writing Tip

Francesca Simon says...

"We love funny stories, silly stories, mystery stories, sad stories – most of all we love stories which only you could write."

The unlikely trio decided to be a team fighting against plastic rubbish. The three plastic-eteers!

(The Three Plastic-eteers, 2018)

Did you know?

…the 2018 stories had over 5000 mermaids and many invented creatures inspired by them, like mermicorn, merlion and merhorse?

Oxford ROALD DAHL Dictionary
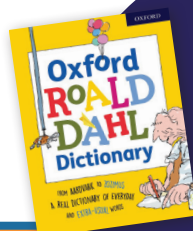
To help your students discover their inner creativity, explore the fun and imaginative use of language in the *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary*.

Action and emotion

Can you show how you're feeling without saying a word? Pick an emotion from the list below and then mime an action that shows how you're feeling. Can the rest of the class guess the right feeling?

eager *excited* **SINISTER** DULL

moody **SCARED** foolish

SECRETIVE embarrassed **bold**

SAD cautious **brave** **happy**

resentful annoyed

grumpy silly kind

gentle romantic

ANGRY smug JOLLY

CHEErFuL

Try to think of at least five other emotions.
Write them down here and then act them out.

irritated

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Editing

Writing the last line of a story doesn't mean a writer has finished having fun. From finding plot holes to polishing their prose, authors check their spelling, punctuation and grammar, and redraft their stories until they feel they're the best they can be. Use some of these activities to help your class revise and edit their stories until they shine.

Story buddies ★ ★★

Find out what genres of stories your class think they have written. You could pair up writers according to the genre of story they love to read and use the story buddy checklist on the next page to give feedback on each other's stories.

Cliché detector ★★

Clichés such as 'the tip of the iceberg' or 'as dead as a door nail' can make a story fall flat. Get your class to suggest their own clichés and collect these on the board. Then challenge the class to change these clichés into something more original. How about 'the pot calling the kettle for a date'? Challenge your writers to look out for clichés in their writing and, if they spot one, to swap it for a more surprising image instead.

Make every word count ★ ★★

Encourage your class to revise and reread their stories to look out for any improvements they could make. Can they spot any words or phrases that are used too often and use synonyms instead? Reading aloud can help your writers to hear any sentences that sound a bit clunky. Encourage your writers to play around with vocabulary and the order of words in their story until it sounds right.

Title terror ★

We won't judge a story by its cover, but picking the right title can get us turning the pages. Ask your class to suggest some of their favourite story titles such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and discuss what makes them work. Challenge your writers to think up their own attention-grabbing titles. This might be an intriguing title such as 'The Grannies who Flew to the Moon' or just one word that jumps out at the reader like 'Monkeynapped'!
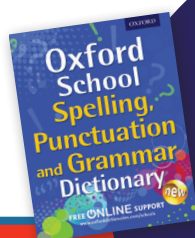
Writing Tip

**Francesca Simon says...**

"Write, re-write, write and re-write some more. Make your story the best it can be."

Did you know?

...capital letters in the 2018 stories appeared not only in names and at the start of a sentence but were used to show anger, fear, excitement and that a character was shouting: "HOW DARE YOU"?

The Oxford School and Oxford Primary spelling, punctuation and grammar dictionaries can help writers edit their work and make their story perfect.

Oxford School Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar Dictionary

Oxford Primary Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Dictionary
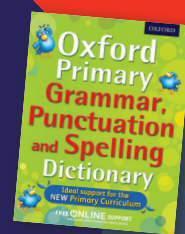
Story buddies

Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes can help you to spot how to make your story even more awesome! Team up with a friend to swap your stories. Use the checklist to note down your thoughts about their story and suggest any improvements.

☐ Does the story have a good title?

☐ Does the opening of the story grab your attention?

☐ Does the plot and action make sense?

☐ Does the setting work?

☐ Did you like the characters?

☐ Can you tell which character is speaking when you read the dialogue?

☐ Does the story have good descriptions?

☐ Do you have a favourite word or phrase in the story?

☐ Do you like the ending?

Enjoy 500 Words!

Don't forget to press the button and submit before 7pm on 8th March 2019!

Submit