

Paperback Writers

Given how much writing already goes on in primary classrooms, who in their right mind would want to add to the load? Answer, we did. Just briefly, and to change the model – to make writing quick, enjoyable, collaborative and, above all with an outcome beyond the classroom.

The key to our project was the speed with which, nowadays, self-publishing allows texts to be processed into real books. Mike is a governor at a one-form entry primary school, which proved happy to invite us in once we'd explained the plan. Helen, the Y6 teacher, was intrigued - and insistent: this was the summer term and Y6 were especially busy; oh, and the local council was coming in to assess – yes, you've guessed it: writing. So, if the project was to work, it had to happen quickly and to schedule.

We arranged to visit Helen and her class for a just one morning. We introduced ourselves and explained to the class that we wanted them to do some writing which would lead to the publication of a paperback book. We would act as their agents, editors and publisher; they would have full control over all other aspects of the process.

We'd settled on the wonderful world of tongue twisters as the focus for the writing. I offered the children some well known ones to try out loud. *A big baby buggy with rubber buggy bumpers* was, I remember was a particular favourite...

Next, we showed the children, probably the best-known English twister, the one featuring Peter Piper. Most knew the first line but didn't know there were three more lines:

*Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper.
A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?*

They also didn't know that there was a whole collection of similar twisters, featuring almost every letter of the alphabet; however, the author seemed weary by the end and couldn't offer anything for X, Y or Z! Published in 1813, that original collection also featured old fashioned items such as a *Quidbox* and a *Catchpoll's Cockscorb*, and so our challenge to the class was to compose 26 new twisters, each following the pattern of that original but finding their own vocabulary.

Helen organised the class into pairs or threes, and each group was given two letters of the alphabet to work on, ensuring no-one got, say, both Q and X. Armed with dictionaries, the children got to work, and by morning break had produced some impressively inventive twisters. Mike's favourite was written by Alexandra and Skye:

*Anastasia Artimus agitated an array of aggressive aardvarks,
An array of aggressive aardvarks Anastasia Artimus agitated.
If Anastasia Artimus agitated an array of aggressive aardvarks,
Where is the array of aggressive aardvarks Anastasia Artimus agitated?*

After break, Mike explained that we would be going soon, and therefore the writers would now be in charge of the task ahead. All 26 twisters must be typed up and emailed to him by the end of the week. For the book, they must write a blurb and an introduction, and choose a title. Mike explained how easy and cost-free it was now to self-publish; the only cost came with the ordering of actual copies and so they must settle on a price per copy and crucially decide how many they would like to order. The children listened with real attention to all this and asked a good number of questions after, showing a remarkably mature commitment to the task.

A quick look on Google and you will find there are a number of self-publishing sites, but we decided to use Amazon KDP and the children understood that they would be doing the same. To register with Amazon, you need set up a KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) account. The registration is free and takes 10-15 minutes. Once done, you can start uploading text. You'll be asked to choose the size and format for the interior and cover of your book. Amazon have a series of templates to help you, and a variety of helpful videos to take you through the whole process. Once everything is uploaded, it takes up to 72 hours for the book to become live. If there are issues with, say, the formatting, then Amazon let you know, and suggest solutions.

When the book is live you can order up to 999 'author copies'. For author copies you pay printing costs (for the book we did with the children this was £1.70) and p&p costs. The class contacted Mike to place an order for 50 books, which worked out to just under £2 per book. Probably the best moment for us was taking the published box of printed books into the class for one last visit and seeing the looks on their faces as they understood what had been achieved. To this day we don't know what the children charged for their books, how they marketed them, who they sold them to and what they chose to do with the profits. We do know that they sold the lot and we've long since had our £100 back!

We also know from Helen that the children had very much liked the novel approach to writing. They'd enjoyed their shared creativity and loved being entrepreneurs, relishing the involvement and control they had over the tasks, the decision-making and the outcomes.

You can still buy the book if you wish. The children's chosen title was *Totally Top Tongue Twisters*, and you can order a copy from Amazon – just type in 'Totally Top Tongue Twisters' and you should find it. If you do buy a copy all the royalties we get from the sale go to our chosen charity, MedEquip4Kids. More to the point you too can turn your classroom into a genuine occasional publishing house and have your children experience some real writing for some real-world outcomes.