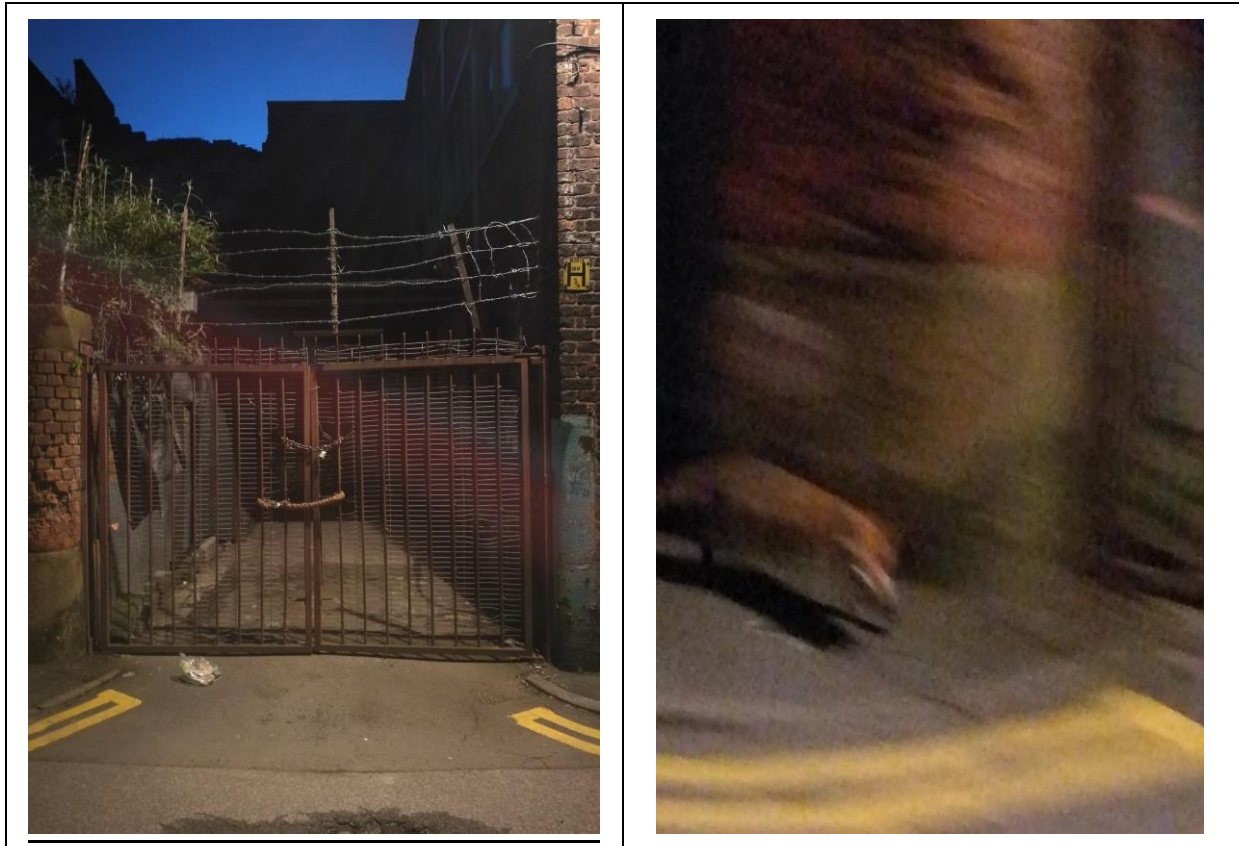


Little Vixen Street



One by one, the shop fronts in the Northern Quarter flicker and die. In the distance, a lone Uber purrs and carries away its last ride. A cool breath exhales through the side streets and the city prepares to sleep.

Suddenly, a side door crashes open and a pool of light reveals tired bins, spewing detritus over the oily pavement. Enola flinches and sinks into the shades and shadows of Little Vixen Street.

A figure emerges from a door, lifts the lid of a bin and casually tosses in a stinking carcass. Enola bides her time, watches and waits. Seconds later, the door snaps shut and the street is dark once more.

Emerging from the darkness like a phantom, amber eyes stare left and right. Nothing. Now to work. Enola knows she needs to return to

the den soon - the cubs in the skulk are hungry and time is precious.

One ear pricked, she hastily sniffs and snuffles through the debris of an upturned bin. Aromas prick her flaring nostrils; jowls drip and drool. Picking through the rubbish, she finds and grabs the evening meal in her muzzle - the chicken carcass is still warm with plenty of meat to share.

Without warning, an old Guinness can clatters, rolls and stops. The pale street light blinks once and holds its breath. Shoulders down, she slowly turns her head and stares, dropping the dripping meat at her paws. A figure looms and creeps forward into the glow of the lamp. Enola thinks. Fight? Flight?

Flash!

Forward. Stumble. Trip.

Flash!

Forward. Stumble. Trip.

Blinded, Enola blinks and thinks. She gathers up her bounty and scampers away through a small gap in the broken fence, leaving the bemused stranger in her wake.

The lone figure stares down at the screen of his iphone. An image of red fuzz stares back through the glass. Swiping left reveals a blur of fur.

Blinking and squinting, she stares back through the rusted chain-link fence as the figure retreats. She is safely hidden again and her cubs will have their fill.

She will return tomorrow night.

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Teaching Notes

Background Context

In March 2017, Pie Corbett, Jo Pearce and I were in Manchester planning a writing project for a group of primary schools. We shared our thoughts about Peter Bunzl's steampunk novel 'Cogheart' which we had all really enjoyed. We all agreed that one of our favourite characters was Malkin the 'mechanimal' fox. Malkin is a mechanical servant, companion and pet to the main character Lily. Bunzl's describes him as, "...a cantankerous know-it-all with real foxy instincts but he's also the possessor of an oversize human ego much larger than his tiny frame." *(Bunzl, writersandartists.co.uk, 2017)*

Making our way back to the hotel, we came across a lone urban fox (Malkin?) rummaging for food in a deserted side street. The fox noticed us but had obviously got used to sharing this space and, while cautious, carried on doing what they needed to do. This story is inspired from that very brief encounter.

Anthropomorphising the cunning or wily fox is a very popular idea in many stories – for example, The Gingerbread Man, Pinocchio, Dahl's Fantastic Mr Fox and of course Aesop's Fables.

The story idea that we share spaces with others who may be more aware of us than we are of them intrigued me. In this story we catch a glimpse of a fox who is 'caught out' by a passing stranger who hopes to capture the moment... The writing is in first person to try and capture the meeting 'in the moment'.

Vocabulary

Read the story through, underline difficult vocabulary and discuss any words or expressions that might present a barrier to understanding. Provide simple, child-friendly definitions. List examples or



synonyms/antonyms and then try using the words in sentences. Use the words and phrases over several days for grammar games as well as rapid reading, spelling and when writing creative sentences.

'Tier Two' Words/phrases (Beck et al 'Bringing Words to Life' 2013)

lone, exhales, breath, spewing detritus, pool of light, flinches, emerges/emerging, hastily, debris, carcass, 'bides her time', precious, phantom, pricked/prickle, aromas, flaring, jowls, drool, muzzle, bounty, looms, scampers, bemused, wake, retreats, 'have their fill', cubs, 'fight or flight', swiping.

World Knowledge & Technical Vocabulary

Uber, Northern Quarter, skulk, den, Guinness, chain-link fence, 'swiping left'.

Oral comprehension

- Who is Enola? Why do you think she is in Little Vixen Street?
- What impression is the author trying to create at the start of the story? How have they done this?
- Re-read the first paragraph together and discuss what may have happened to each of the characters before the story starts?
- Why do you think the author only names one of the characters?
- What tense has the author used? What impression does this create? What happens if we change the tense?
- How does the mood develop as the story unfolds?
- Do you think this is the first time Enola has visited the area?
- How does Enola feel at the start and then the end of the story? How do we know?
- Where might the 'figure' in paragraph 3 have come from?
- What do you think Enola is afraid of?
- Do you think the two 'figures' are a real threat to Enola?

- Is there a difference between what the people think about the bins and what Enola thinks about them?
- How did the author change the mood in paragraph 6?
- What might the repetition of 'forward, stumble, trip' suggest about the second figure?
- Why do you think Enola was 'blinded' in paragraph 8?
- What does the word 'scampers' suggest in paragraph 8?
- How do you think the figure with his phone feels when he discovers Enola?
- What impression does the writer try to create with the terms 'red fuzz' and a 'blur of fur' in paragraph 9?
- What does the term 'blinking and squinting' in paragraph 10 suggest?
- Explain the use of alliteration in the words: *sinks into the shades and shadows...*

Explore the Story through Drama

Drama is a key strategy to help children deepen their imaginative engagement with a story. It can also help to have children writing in-role as if they were one of the characters.

- Hot seat Enola and her family of cubs;
- in pairs, be an 'eye-witnesses' to what happened;
- create monologues for the figure with his phone, thinking about what he might have seen or heard or thought before and after the event.

In role, as Enola:

- tell your family of cubs about what happened;
- what advice might you give to your cubs as they start to explore the area.

In role as school friends;

- ‘gossip’ about what you have heard about Little Vixen Street;
- in pairs or threes, tell the story of what happened when Enola revisits the street the next night.

Poetry

Locate poems to read and perform linked to some of the themes and ideas explored in the model text. Foxes are often cast as the villain in literature – The Gingerbread Man, Pinocchio, Aesop’s fables, etc.

One challenging poem that might be worth discussing is ‘The Thought Fox’ by Ted Hughes which uses the fox’s tracks in the snow as a metaphor for the writing process.

Grammar

Identify, or build into the model, several grammar focuses that you want to see children use in their independent writing.

Little Vixen Street has been written in the present tense. This allows some rewriting in different tenses to look at how language changes when we change tense and the effect this creates for the reader. For example, you could rewrite sentences or paragraphs in the past perfect, past progressive or future tense and then play ‘Compare’ – Discussing the effect created and which one works best?

One by one, the shop fronts in the Northern Quarter flicker and die. In the distance, a lone Uber purrs and carries away its last ride.
<i>One by one, the shop fronts in the Northern Quarter flickered and died. In the distance, a lone Uber purred and carried away its last ride.</i>
<i>One by one, the shop fronts in the Northern Quarter were flickering and dying. In the distance, a lone Uber was purring, carrying away its last ride.</i>
<i>One by one, the shop fronts in the Northern Quarter will flicker and die. In the distance, a lone Uber will purr and carry away its last ride.</i>

Identify a few sentences from the model to 'Imitate and Innovate' and model creating new sentences, innovating with new characters, settings and events. The aim is for children to internalise, orally and through shortburst writing, a wider range of sentence structures that they can then use in their independent writing.

In Little Vixen Street I have included the following:

1. The use of a dash to add in additional descriptive detail:

Picking through the rubbish, she finds and grabs the evening meal in her muzzle - the chicken carcass is still warm with plenty of meat to share.

2. Using a list sentence of 3 with a comma showing the actions of characters:

Action

A figure emerges from a door, lifts the lid of a bin and casually tosses in a stinking carcass.

A shorter sentence of 3:

Enola bides her time, watches and waits.

Or a short sentence of 3 with an added fronted adverbial...

Without warning, an old Guinness can clatters, rolls and stops.

3. Adding additional detail by extending the sentence using a non-finite clause:

Shoulders down, she slowly turns her head and stares, dropping the dripping meat at her paws.



4. Showing quick actions through an exclamation and then 3 short sentence fragments where the agent of the action is implied and the reader has to fill in the gaps (note the 'magpieing' of Rosen and Oxenbury's, 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt!'):

Flash!

Forward. Stumble. Trip.

Flash!

Forward. Stumble. Trip.

5. The use of a semi-colon to create coordinating sentences that add descriptive detail (note you could substitute 'and' for the ;)

Aromas prickle her flaring nostrils; jowls drip and drool.

6. Using fronted adverbials to add in detail for when, where and how an action takes place – what effect is being created? Positioning the adverbial at the start of the sentence emphasises this point for the reader and can break up the 'subject-verb' sentence starter which can be repetitive and exhausting for the reader:

When?

Suddenly,... Without warning,...

Where? (Prepositional Phrases)

In the distance,...

How?

Slowly,... One ear pricked,... Shoulders down,... Blinded,...

Blinking and squinting,...

Magpie other examples from your class reading. Then use adverbials over several days to practice building up suspense, picking out descriptive detail, focusing on character's feelings and moving the action on. Another key point would be to ensure the use of the comma following a fronted adverbial is secure.

The intention is to internalise the language beyond just the examples in the model. These could be practised every day by making up 5 sentence stories or retelling/writing a brief paragraph starting with a list of adverbials.

For example,

Think of a setting and a character.

Now, take your character on a journey through this setting starting each sentence with:

- *Slowly,...*
- *One ear pricked,...*
- *In the distance,...*
- *Without warning,...*
- *Turning,...*

Story Writing

Little Vixen Street is probably best described as a 'meeting tale' of characters from different 'worlds' – in this case the animal world and the human world. Less confident writers could use the same story pattern to create their own version of the story or even write the sequel where Enola revisits the setting the next night as this is how the story ends.

The model could be rewritten in the past tense or used to introduce writing stories or sections of stories in the present tense. For example, a portal story or a 'dream sequence' can be enhanced

switching from past to present tense by the skilled writer aiming for greater depth.

Your more confident writers might innovate by retelling the story from the viewpoint of the 'lonely figure', developing and embellishing this character and hiding the motives and feelings of Enola.

The story could also lend itself to more sophisticated innovations, particularly for your more confident readers and writers. For example, you could add in a 'defeating a monster' or a 'portal' element to explain how the character(s) from 'another world' arrive and leave the setting – this could be a 'Close Encounters' type alien adventure or a fantasy with another community sharing our familiar spaces when we are not there (e.g., 'The Borrowers' or 'Toy Story'). Alternatively, this could form the basis for a ghostly encounter with the 'threat' trying to capture the moment and failing to get the evidence...

Boxing Up

Underlying 'Bare Bones'	New Idea for Innovation (an example)
Familiar characters in a familiar setting. Set in a transition time – e.g., end of day, dawn,...	<i>Last teacher, Mrs. Timidson, ushered out of the Hovel Academy (a dull school) late at night by caretaker – Alan. The main door left unlocked.</i>
Introduce main character hiding and watching.	<i>A creature from another world, observes the school.</i>
Main character does something they need to do.	<i>The creature seeks knowledge about stories and wants to use them to make school exciting!</i>



Main character interrupted by a potential 'threat'.	<i>Alan spots strange lights/sounds coming from the school and returns to check. The creature hears Alan and hides... watching.</i>
The threat gets closer and tries to 'capture' the main character.	<i>Alan discovers the creature in library and tries to make contact.</i>
Main character escapes.	<i>Creature feels threatened and leaves, wiping the memory of Alan.</i>
Threat disappointed. Main character left watching...	Alan feels puzzled with a vague memory of something but can't recall detail. However, he is more optimistic about the future and the school has changed! The creature watches and waits... then materialises as Mrs. Timidson entering school with a trolley full of children's story books ready for the new day...

Writing toolkit

A key aspect to this sort of story is building the description of the setting and how the characters move in that setting with tension being built up throughout. The reader needs to be able to picture the characters otherwise there will be no tension. Co-construct a toolkit with the children identifying techniques the writer has used to build tension:

To create tension you could:

- Put the main character alone in a rundown setting using some well-chosen adjectives e.g., , *'...bins, spewing detritus over the oily pavement', '...rusted chain-link fence'*.
- Use the dark to hide your character e.g., *sinks into the shades and shadows...*
- Set the story at a time of transition e.g., *end of the working day, when everyone has gone to bed, first thing in the morning.*
- Put the main character in an unexpected setting, e.g. *a fox in an urban setting.*
- Use darkness and cold weather, e.g. *streetlights, darkness, cool breath.*
- Make your setting feel like it's alive using metaphors and similes e.g., *'like a phantom', '...a lone Uber purrs', '...breath exhales through a side street.', , '...city prepares to sleep', '...tired bins', 'The pale street light blinks once and holds its breath.'*
- Use sentences of three to build description of action, e.g. *'...a figure emerges from a door, lifts the lid of a bin and casually tosses in a stinking carcass.'* Or *'Enola bides her time, watches and waits.'*
- Have your main character hear 'something' before seeing it.
- Engage the senses to pick out descriptive detail e.g., *'...stinking carcass, 'Aromas prickle her flaring nostrils; jowls drip and drool.'*
- Use alliteration, rhyme and onomatopoeia to help hook the reader in e.g., *sinks into the shades and shadows, '...watches and waits', 'sniffs and snuffles...', 'drip and drool',...'dropping the dripping...', 'Blinking and squinting...'*

Shared Writing

Pitch the shared writing at the appropriate level to ensure the children make progress. With confident classes, leave the model behind and just work from the basic plot idea and the toolkit,

broadening the tools by drawing on other examples from quality texts you have read.

Below is an example innovation using the boxed-up plan and elements of the toolkit from the model and other examples (also using previous toolkits that develop character and dialogue). The challenge here is to write in a sci-fi genre in the first person.

*“Are you **still** here Mrs. Timidson?”*

“Won’t be long now Mr. Jenkins. Just need to mark these last three books and then I’m out of here.”

Alan Jenkins sighs, rolls his jaded eyes and trudges back along the silent corridor passing the open door of class 3S. He tuts and notes the dirt and detritus amassing on the carpet area that Mr. Slapdash seems to have conveniently ignored – that will have to wait. A stale stench permeates from a locked cupboard. It has been a very long day and Alan just wants to lock up and retreat home...

Twenty minutes later, Mrs. Timidson scurries towards the entrance, pulling her burden of books, hitching a ride inside a grumbling, red, plastic trolley. As she passes Alan, she shrugs, grins and then lowers her eyes. Alan forces a smile back - this must be her way of apologising, he thinks. Moments later, the door swings back and she vanishes. The Hovel Academy takes a deep breath and sighs; a host of shushes echo throughout the empty halls. Alan shudders and prepares to lock up and leave.

Outside, hidden eyes search and scan in the gloom of the car park. Suddenly, a quiver of pale blue light pulses across the entrance, causing Alan to drop his keys and then, glassy-eyed, start for home...

Emerging from the shadows, a ripple of energy gravitates towards the open door, hovers briefly and then materialises into a...

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Dean is an accredited Talk for Writing trainer who has been working to develop Primary English in schools for nearly 20 years. His previous roles include: National Programme Director for Primary School Improvement with the National Strategies, Local Authority School Improvement Lead, Literacy Advisor and Primary School Leader. Dean is developing Talk for Reading and Writing in schools across the UK and internationally.

Do you want to develop the Talk for Writing and Talk for Reading approach across the whole school?

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