



Primary School  
Curriculum



# English

Language  
Teacher Guidelines



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# English

Language

Teacher Guidelines

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# *Talk and discussion*



## Section 1

# English in the primary curriculum

# English in the primary curriculum

## Principles of the English language curriculum:

- the integration of oral language, reading and writing in a coherent language learning process
- the dual function of language learning and learning through language
- the central place of oral language throughout the curriculum
- the development of reading skills through a range of approaches
- the process of writing is as important as the product.

## The centrality of language

English has a unique position and function in the curriculum because it is the first language of the majority of children in Ireland. The child meets ideas and concepts through listening and reading and he/she expresses understanding and recounts experience through speaking and writing. The better the child's ability with language, the more effectively he/she will learn.

## Principles of language learning

The structure of the English curriculum and the style of language learning it advocates have been informed by five principles:

### The integration of oral language, reading and writing

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated in the process of learning language. For example, the child's ability with oral language can be a determining factor in the speed and effectiveness with which he/she makes progress in reading, just as the experience of reading will extend vocabulary and enhance control of sentence structure.

Similarly, there is a close relationship between competence in reading and the ability to express oneself in writing. Thus, each of the three functions draws from and feeds into the others to form an interrelated process of language learning.

## Language learning and learning through language

The English curriculum is concerned not just with language learning but with learning through language. In the process of acquiring language skills and in developing the ability to use language, other dimensions of the child's personality and potential are cultivated and enriched. The learning of a new word, for instance, or an extended meaning of a word already known, can entail more than an expansion of the child's vocabulary. It can interact with concepts that are already familiar in a way that deepens and broadens perception. Likewise, in attempting to express emotional or imaginative experience, the act of putting feelings and intuitions into language can provide a focus that deepens the child's knowledge of him/herself and the world. Furthermore, it is through enhanced language skill and understanding that the child gains meaningful access to the full range of the curriculum.

### The central place of oral language throughout the curriculum

The development of oral language is given an importance as great as that of reading and writing, at every level, in the curriculum, and it has an equal weighting with them in the integrated language process. It will have a crucial role to play not only in language learning but as an approach to teaching throughout the curriculum.

### Learning to read through a range of approaches

The curriculum incorporates an approach to the teaching of reading that is based on the child's overall experience of language and the world, and involves the use of a range of word identification strategies. It also asserts that his/her reading experience should be as rich and varied as possible. This can only be realised through the consistent use of well-stocked school and class libraries as well as through the use of reading schemes.

### The process of writing is as important as the product

The curriculum stresses the importance of the process of writing as well as the product. It incorporates the principle that the act of writing is a part of the language learning process. It asserts that the child can become an independent writer by attempting to write and by self-correcting his/her writing with the prompting and guidance of the teacher. This entails a consistent experience of writing, editing and redrafting that involves the child in writing on a wide range of topics, in a variety of genres and for different audiences.



# The content of the English curriculum

# The content of the English curriculum

Strand	Strand units
Receptiveness to language	<b>Oral</b> developing receptiveness to oral language
	<b>Reading</b> developing concepts of language and print [Infant classes] developing strategies [First to sixth classes]
	<b>Writing</b> creating and fostering the impulse to write
Competence and confidence in using language	<b>Oral</b> developing competence and confidence in using oral language
	<b>Reading</b> developing reading skills and strategies [Infant classes] reading for pleasure and information [First to sixth classes]
	<b>Writing</b> developing competence, confidence and the ability to write independently
Developing cognitive abilities through language	<b>Oral</b> developing cognitive abilities through oral language
	<b>Reading</b> developing interests, attitudes and the ability to think
	<b>Writing</b> clarifying thought through writing
Emotional and imaginative development through language	<b>Oral</b> developing emotional and imaginative life through oral language
	<b>Reading</b> responding to text
	<b>Writing</b> developing emotional and imaginative life through writing

## Basic structure and layout of the curriculum

### Levels

The content of the English curriculum is set out in four levels: infant classes, first and second classes, third and fourth classes, fifth and sixth classes.

### Content strands

Content is presented in four strands at each level:

- Receptiveness to language
- Competence and confidence in using language
- Developing cognitive abilities through language
- Emotional and imaginative development through language.

### Strand units

Within each strand the detailed elements of content are presented in three strand units which describe aspects of oral language, reading and writing, respectively.

### The integrated nature of language

Although any one of these strands or strand units may, on its own, be directed towards the advancement of some particular skill, or the enhancement of some other area of the child's development, none stands in isolation. A complex web of interconnections

exists, not only between the elements of the strand units in each strand but across all the strands. In this way a rich tapestry of language activity and experience is created.

It is through an awareness of connections and interrelationships between the content elements in the various strand units and across the strands that the teacher will use the programme most fruitfully.

## The strands of the curriculum

### Receptiveness to language

The strand, *Receptiveness to language*, is concerned with children's willingness and ability to listen, to be aware of the nuances of language and to assimilate what they hear and read. Experiences that make language attractive to children and encourage them not merely to listen but to attend to what is said are crucial in enabling them to take part in appropriate listener-speaker relationships. A second factor that affects the child's receptiveness to language is his/her ability to understand. This involves extending receptive vocabulary and cultivating an appreciation of the function that sentence structure has to play in the communication of meaning. It also includes developing the capacity to read and understand the printed word and fostering an appreciation of the value of writing as a means of communication.

This strand, therefore, is directed towards developing a receptiveness to spoken language that ranges from recognising and observing simple commands at the infant level to following detailed instructions and directions in the senior classes. It progresses from something as simple as understanding the importance of eye-contact to interpreting mood, attitude, emotion and atmosphere. It is also concerned, crucially, with the development of literacy. It is through the elements of this strand that the child will develop the ability to use a variety of strategies to interpret text and to communicate in writing.

### Competence and confidence in using language

This strand, *Competence and confidence in using language*, is concerned with developing the child's ability to use language as a speaker, a reader and a writer. It seeks, in the first place, to develop the child's oral fluency and receptiveness. In achieving competence with language the child will learn to initiate and sustain conversations and to take turns in a classroom atmosphere that promotes tolerance for the views and opinions of others. Learning to use language for the purpose of everyday social interaction—greeting, expressing sympathy or appreciation, welcoming visitors—is an important element of this strand. It is also concerned with developing the child's ability to read for functional and recreational purposes.

This will entail giving him/her experience of an appropriate range of narrative, expository and representational text that will extend as he/she matures as a reader.

As reading and comprehension skills develop, the child should be given the opportunity to pursue personal interests in reading. In this way, the habit of reading can be cultivated and the child can be led to perceive reading as useful and pleasurable. This strand also addresses the child's competence as a writer. Starting with scribbles and pictures he/she will gradually learn to use words, phrases and later sentences to communicate ideas and feelings. The approach to writing envisaged in the curriculum involves the consistent use of a process of writing, editing and redrafting. Through talk and discussion with the teacher, the child's ability to self-correct writing can be fostered thus enabling him/her to write independently. This will entail, among other things, the child's gaining control of the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

## Developing cognitive abilities through language

One of the principles on which the English curriculum is based is that the child learns through language, that he/she can use language to clarify images and so facilitate the cognitive organisation of concepts and ideas. By using language to name, classify, modify and order things and ideas, knowledge is extended. As words gain ever more complex accretions of meaning they become the storehouse of an ever increasing fund of knowledge and concepts. The child also learns through language in a more obvious way. Much of what he/she learns in school is accessible only through language and this underlines the importance of the first two strands. The ability to listen and assimilate meaning and the ability to read and comprehend are key factors in the learning process.

The child is encouraged to ask questions, to predict outcomes and to discuss solutions to problems. He/she is also given opportunities, both orally and in writing, to experience activities such as justifying an attitude or arguing a point of view. Particular attention is paid to developing higher order thinking skills such as evaluation, analysis, inference and deduction, and the child is encouraged to use writing in order to clarify thought.

## Emotional and imaginative development through language

This strand addresses a most important facet of the development of the child's personality. Through emotional and imaginative response children will often reflect what is most individual and complex in their make-up. In exploring emotions they can come to a better understanding of themselves and of their relationships with others. Through the world of the imagination they can glimpse the infinite possibilities of the human condition.

Talk and discussion will be the central context for the exploration of emotion throughout the child's life in school. The child should be encouraged to express feelings and reactions to a wide range of everyday experience and to respond to the experiences of others. In the early years play will have a very important role in stimulating the child's emotional and imaginative life. However, as he/she gets older reading and writing experience will, increasingly, provide the context through which imagination and emotion can be explored. A rich experience of literature and poetry will be central to this process and the child should be encouraged to respond in a variety of ways. Improvisational drama will be particularly relevant to this area of the child's development at every level.



*Using language  
across the curriculum*

## Section 3

# School planning for English

# School planning for English

To ensure that the aims of the English curriculum are realised it is important that the principal and staff draw up a coherent plan for the teaching of English throughout the school. This collaborative process will involve parents and the board of management where appropriate.

This section of the guidelines will examine:

- Curriculum planning for English
- Organisational planning for English.

## Curriculum planning

Apart from general considerations that apply to the planning of every area of learning, particular attention should be paid to a number of issues when developing the school plan for English. Among the more important of these are the following:

### The principles of language learning in the curriculum

The principles that inform the English curriculum have been discussed in Section 1. They are:

- the integration of oral language, reading and writing in a coherent language process
- the complementary outcomes of language learning and learning through language
- the central place given to oral language throughout the curriculum

- the development of reading skills through language experience and a range of word identification strategies, and the use of a wide range of reading material to satisfy children's reading needs
- a concentration in the writing process on helping the children to become independent writers.

All of these have implications for school planning and require decisions in a number of crucial areas.

### The language needs of children

The language needs of children in any particular school will be influenced by their social, cultural and economic backgrounds. These can vary greatly within the school and from school to school and will constitute the starting point for a discussion on the school's approach to language learning. The language ability children bring with them to school will influence greatly the level and intensity of oral language activity they need to experience not just in the early years but throughout the primary school. It may, for instance, help to dictate the particular emphases that the school needs to place on different aspects of oral language activity (for example on vocabulary extension or developing the listener/speaker relationship).

*The language needs of each child provide the starting point for an approach to language development.*

Because the approach to reading is based on children's general language experience and ability, decisions should be taken on the nature, quality and extent of language activity that is needed to support the introduction of reading.

### **An integrated language process**

Oral language, reading and writing are not discrete language activities in the language learning process. It is important, therefore, that school planning for English takes account of this in practice as well as in principle. The consideration that all three aspects of language—oral language, reading and writing—have a role to play in developing each of the strands of the curriculum will affect many of the decisions taken in relation to language learning activities. For example, in writing, the aim of promoting children's cognitive development through language will have considerable influence on the topics chosen and audiences for whom they write.

### **Oral language in the integrated language process**

The pivotal role that has been given to oral language, both for its own sake and as a crucial integrating factor in the English programme, has considerable implications for curriculum planning. Although some of the activities suggested presuppose their own time allocation, much oral language activity can be accomplished by integrating it with other activities both in the language programme and in the curriculum generally.

At this level of planning serious consideration should be given to three issues:

- maximising the use of oral language in developing children's comprehension and reader response skills. This would entail a much greater use of oral language as an alternative to written exercises.
- a consideration of how oral language activity can be used as a basis for writing.
- the use of oral language activity as teaching strategy in every area of the curriculum.

### The approach to reading

An effective approach to the teaching of reading will require comprehensive planning at school level. This will involve such considerations as

- fostering an approach to reading that is based on children's general language development
- the central role of phonological and phonemic awareness in the acquisition of word identification strategies
- the use of reading schemes
- the development of school and class libraries
- the planning of book-related events, such as book fairs and book weeks
- the use of alternative reading material, including textbooks from other areas of the curriculum
- the involvement of parents in children's reading
- the approach to assessment and remediation.



Children learn to write through the process of writing.

### The approach to writing

The approach to writing outlined in the curriculum presupposes a gradual development of the child's ability to write through the actual process of writing. If the child is to become an effective writer and attain autonomous control of factors such as grammar, punctuation and spelling the school needs to develop an approach to writing that involves a consistent use of drafting, editing and redrafting.

In order to become an independent writer the child needs to attain, progressively, mastery of conventional spelling. Progress in spelling is most likely to be achieved if it is taught systematically using a multi-dimensional approach (as is outlined in Section 5, Approaches and methodologies).

It is important, too, that the school plans and develops a style of penmanship that will enable the children to write in an acceptable, legible style. From their earliest school experience, children should be encouraged to learn to grip the pencil appropriately and to adopt a comfortable writing posture as a matter of habit. In the junior infant class they should have plenty of experience in pre-writing scribbling and pattern work. The early style of handwriting that is most accessible to children will be based on the print style of their reading material.

However, from the start they should be encouraged to form letters in a way that will facilitate the introduction of a cursive script later on. A good cursive style of handwriting has a number of advantages. It will ultimately improve the speed and fluency of writing, which in turn will assist the child's written expression. It can also have a significant influence in improving spelling since letter strings are connected when the child is writing a word.

The role of Information and Communication Technologies should be given particular consideration. Word processing is especially valuable in the process of editing and redrafting, and, as with good handwriting, can enhance the quality of the final presentation and so constitute both an incentive and a source of pride to the child.

### Language across the curriculum

One of the principles of the curriculum is that children learn through language. Language is crucial in the acquisition of knowledge and in the development of concepts. Oral language activity has a particularly important role to play in learning, and the use of talk and discussion is seen as a powerful learning strategy in every curriculum area. It is important that the principal and staff are continually aware of the close relationship between language and learning and that they identify the ways in which language can be used to maximise children's learning.

### Assessment tools in English

- teacher observation
- teacher-designed tasks and tests
- work samples, portfolios and projects
- curriculum profiles
- diagnostic tests
- standardised tests

### Assessment

Assessment is complementary to the learning and teaching process. In planning the English curriculum at school level, therefore, consideration needs to be given to the place that assessment will have in mediating the curriculum most effectively to the children.

Promoting and valuing the contribution that assessment has to make to the teaching and learning of language is an important aspect of the development of the school's assessment policy. The curriculum statement summarises the formative, diagnostic, summative and evaluative roles of assessment. Their combined purpose is to help the teacher to enhance the learning experiences of the children.

#### *Assessment in English can*

- show how children are progressing in the different strands of the English curriculum
- identify children who are performing significantly better or worse than their peers
- isolate areas of difficulty in order to facilitate diagnosis and intervention
- show the progress children make from year to year
- make communication about children's progress easier between teachers
- assist in making decisions about curriculum programmes and teaching strategies

- provide the basis for reporting to parents
- provide summative information about children when they are transferring to other schools.

#### *A range of assessment tools*

The curriculum suggests a range of tools that can facilitate this assessment process. In planning for assessment in the English curriculum, the staff should decide on the particular combination of tools that it feels would be of most benefit in the teaching and assessment of the English curriculum.

#### *A common understanding of assessment*

Although some allowance should be made for teachers' professional discretion in the use of assessment, the overall approach should be consistent throughout the school. This will ensure a common reference against which children's progress, ability and needs are measured and promote consistency in recording and reporting. It will also provide for the gradual and unbroken development of the child.

## Organisational planning

Having considered the needs of the school in terms of the English curriculum it is important to address the features of school organisation that will best facilitate their fulfilment. This will entail a collaborative and consultative process involving the principal, the teachers and, where appropriate, parents and the board of management.

Planning for English should contribute to the overall school plan which will be reviewed by the board of management. Within the resources available to it the board will provide support for the development and implementation of the curriculum.

A member of staff, particularly in larger schools, may have a special interest or expertise in language and literature or in the teaching of language.

He/she may wish to take responsibility for the general organisation of the teaching of English in the school.

This could include functions such as

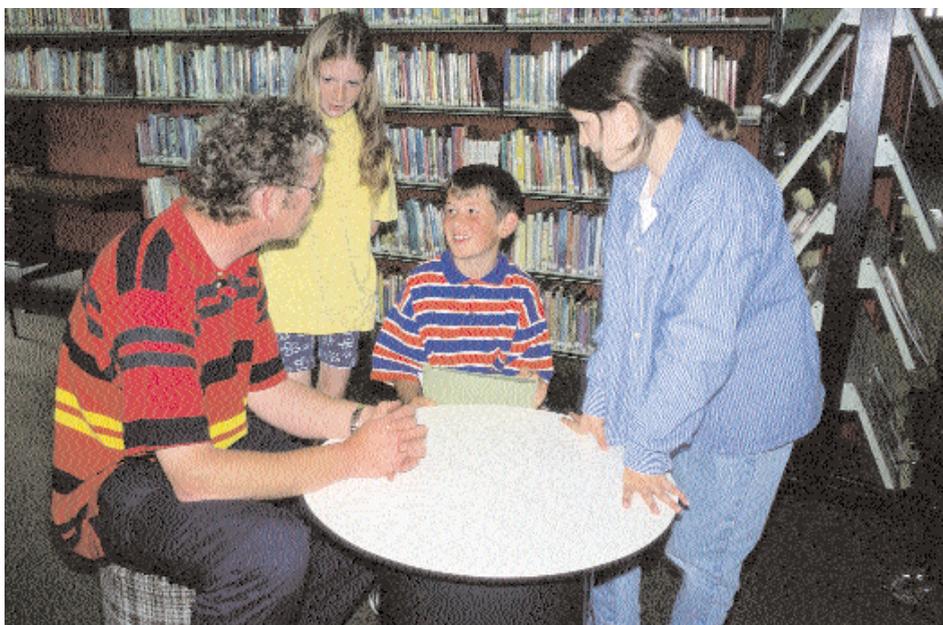
- overseeing the organisation of the library
- advising on the choice of a reading scheme
- suggesting books and anthologies to other members of staff
- organising book-related events for the school
- liaising with the public library

The contribution of libraries cannot be over-emphasised. They are a crucial resource for language development and for learning in all areas of the curriculum. Organising, supporting and staffing the library can also provide excellent opportunities for the involvement of parents in very meaningful ways in the life of the school.

- helping to co-ordinate English with other areas of the curriculum
- co-ordinating the approach to the teaching of poetry
- co-ordinating the approach to the teaching of writing.

### Library

The ready availability of a wide variety of suitable books is essential in all schools. Such a resource will cater for the needs of every area of the curriculum and should be provided through the establishment of a well-stocked school library in every school. It should be organised in such a way as to ensure that maximum use is made of the entire range of reading resources available and that these resources at all times meet the requirements of the school in general and of individual teachers and pupils.



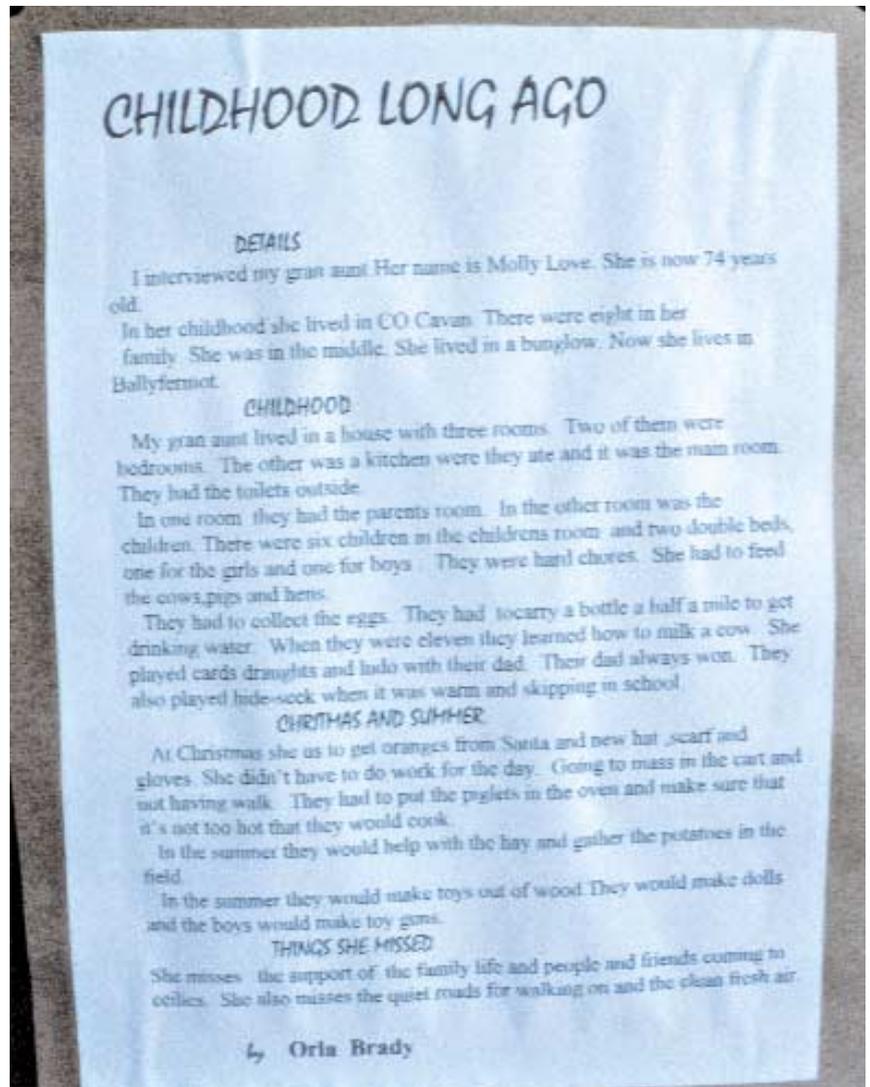
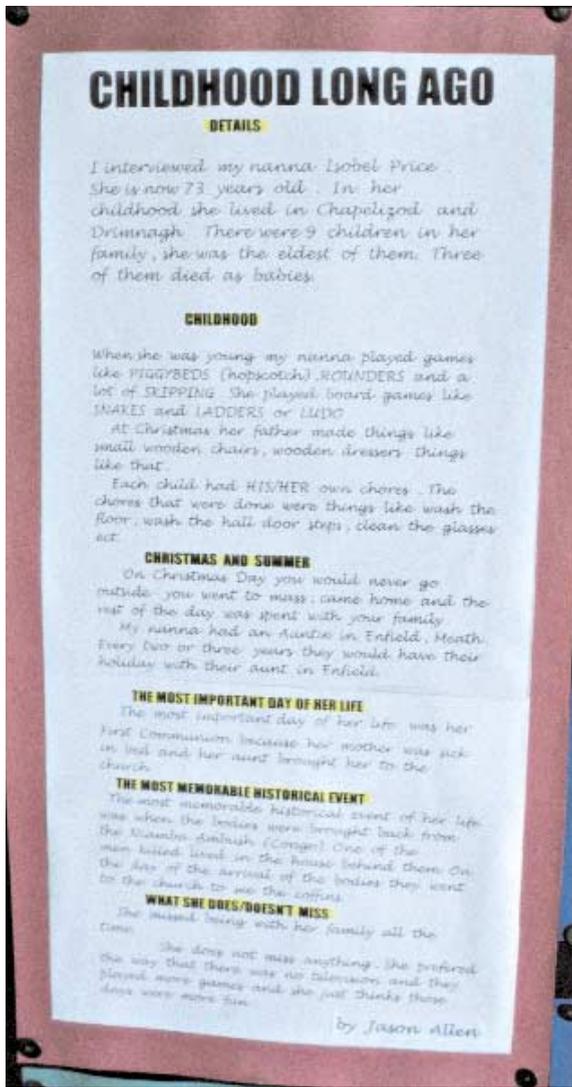
The teacher as one of a community of readers.

In larger schools it will be possible to organise the school library in a central location. It is essential, however, that such a facility is complemented by well-stocked and regularly supplemented classroom libraries.

This is particularly important in the light of the stress the curriculum lays on the need for a variety of reading materials to complement the use of reading schemes. In some smaller schools it may not be possible to have a centrally located school library and in such cases library provision will be confined to classroom libraries only.

It is important also that the school gain the maximum advantage from any other available library sources in order to complement the provision based in the school, although these should never be relied on as the school's sole source of library provision.

The efficient organisation and monitoring of the library requires careful planning. Responsibility for it would normally be assumed by one or two members of staff but it also presents opportunities for the involvement of parents. Pupils should also have a role in the organisation and maintenance of the library. Through such experience they can be trained in book location skills and learn to use the system of arranging books in a public library to gain access to reading material.



Interviews with grandparents are a rich source for expository writing while fostering an understanding of life in the past.



Children should have access to books from the earliest years.

## Developing a reading culture in the school

Both school and classroom libraries have an important contribution to make in creating a school atmosphere in which books and reading are seen as valuable and pleasurable. Various other strategies can also be used to accomplish this, including

- organising book fairs and other book events. These can be particularly valuable if parents are also involved
- inviting poets and writers to the school to read and speak to the children
- inviting local library staff to speak to the children.

## The teaching of reading

In planning for the teaching of reading it is important that the school provides each child with a reading experience appropriate to his/her needs and abilities. Although the programme recognises a role for a structured reading scheme, such a scheme can be regarded as only one among a number of sources necessary to provide an adequate reading experience for the child. However, as a convenient source of graded reading material, as a support to the less able reader and as a focus for whole-class discussion and comprehension work, it is a useful resource. It is essential, however, that it is complemented by a wide range of other reading material encompassing a

variety of narrative, expository and representational text. Other issues that need to be taken into consideration in organising the approach to reading would be:

- the need to co-ordinate the planning and work of the remedial teacher and the various other members of staff
- the need to ensure that the particular curriculum and organisational decisions on the teaching of reading are implemented
- the need for the principal or a member of staff to act in a liaison capacity to monitor any difficulties that might arise.

## The role of parents in language development

Parents have a crucial role to play in children's language development. It is important that the school's planning should ensure that they are involved in this aspect of learning and that their contribution to it is fully acknowledged and maximised.

The child comes to school with considerable verbal facility that has been acquired through the interactive experience of the home. This will continue to be a major factor in the child's developmental process throughout the primary school years. Talking to adults, hearing them talk, hearing stories read and told and being encouraged to read, all have an influence on children's language

*Reading difficulties should be identified as early as possible.*

development that supports and complements school experience.

Parents will also have an important role to play to the extent that they are involved in children's language development in school. It is important that the school devises strategies that will accomplish this in the most effective possible way.

This can be done through consultation with parents at certain stages of the planning process and could take account of issues such as

- the importance of oral language in the learning process
  - the importance of involving children in purposeful language activity
  - the importance of encouraging children to read
  - the importance of early reading development and the strategies the school employs to enhance it
  - paired reading activity
  - story reading
  - school policy on reading
  - the school's approach to the teaching of writing
  - responding to children's writing
  - the organisation and supervision of the school library
  - the organisation of book fairs and other language-related events
  - visits by authors, storytellers, poets and drama groups
- the approach to assessment
  - effective communication between teachers and parents.

### Early identification and remediation of reading difficulties

It is essential that children with language and reading difficulties are identified as early as possible and given the necessary remedial support. It is generally recognised that if a child is going to encounter difficulty with reading the problem will have begun to manifest itself by the time he/she has reached senior infants. Through day-to-day observation the class teacher will readily recognise those children who need extra help but a school policy of formally assessing all children at this level has much to recommend it. It is then possible for the school to arrange the appropriate remedial help at the earliest possible juncture. If the school has access to a remedial teacher he/she can liaise with the class teacher and organise the assessment of children.

When a child with reading difficulties has been identified an appropriate programme of remedial intervention should be put in place.

To ensure that this is done in the most effective and efficient way the school will have to address a number of issues:

- will the children with reading difficulties be withdrawn from class for remedial help?
- if they are, how is the potential disruption in classroom organisation to be minimised?
- how can remedial provision be organised in order to minimise disruption to those children's engagement with the rest of the curriculum?
- will the remedial teacher work with individual pupils or groups?
- should the remedial teacher visit the classroom and work with individual pupils?
- how will the school's system of remedial intervention be evaluated?
- should the remedial teacher teach the body of the class occasionally while the class teacher takes a small group of children with reading difficulties?
- how can parents be involved most effectively in supporting the child?

When such decisions are taken it is important that there is close co-operation between the remedial teacher and the class teacher to ensure that the children obtain the maximum benefit from the remedial programme in the shortest possible time.

Character for story

My character is an elephant called Muzambi. Muzambi is a very tall, kind, strong elephant. He lives with his mother and family and Uncle and Cousin. He is the smallest elephant in the herd.



The Escape - Summary

Muzambi woke up this morning and he was surprised to find his mother had been shot. He ran away and hid in a hole. He was very scared.

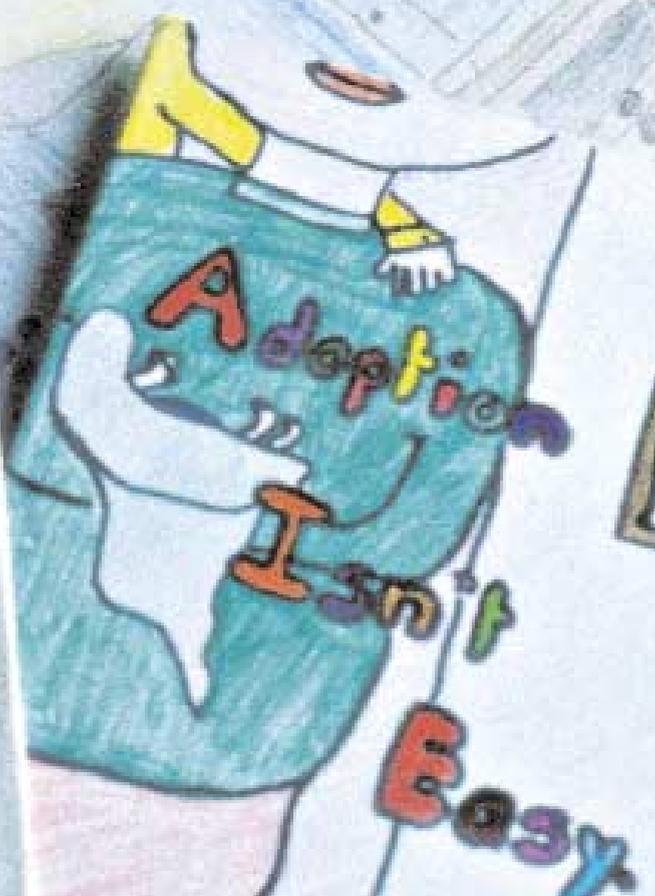
Finally, Muzambi got up and started to go to the waterhole to get a drink. He heard his mother's name. He was very happy to see her. She was very weak and he was very sad. He was very happy to see her. She was very weak and he was very sad.

Statement: Muzambi went back to his mother. Mother woke up. He was very happy. His mother eventually died.

THE JOURNEY



MAGIC BEDROOM



Chapter 1  
In Dublin City

Change as it might come I am a cat who can remember his 4 legs of being. I was born in Dublin City. I was very scared for fear I was a poor kitten with no home to go to every night. I always had to catch food myself for winter. I was very sad.

## Section 4

# Classroom planning for English

# Classroom planning for English

This section gives advice on the planning of the teacher's work in the classroom.

## The integration of the strands and strand units of the curriculum

In planning the English curriculum in the classroom the teacher needs to take account, first and foremost, of its integrated nature. This entails thinking about the curriculum and planning its implementation not in terms of the three language forms, oral language, reading and writing, but in terms of the four strands

- *Receptiveness to language*
- *Competence and confidence in using language*

- *Developing cognitive abilities through language*
- *Emotional and imaginative development through language.*

The contributory elements of the three language forms feed into the four strands and are directed towards the child's development as each particular strand defines it. It is by teaching towards the strands that the teacher can provide an integrated language learning experience for the children.

This can be accomplished by an imaginative use of the content elements within the strand units. At times the activities suggested will be geared more or less exclusively towards the particular facet of development envisaged in the strand unit. For example, in the strand unit for first and second classes 'Reading: for pleasure and information' the objective 'perform alphabetical tasks' is concerned directly with enhancing children's dictionary skills which will become part of their competence as readers.

More often than not, however, there are natural linkages to be found between content objectives within a strand, as the examples on page 25 clearly demonstrate.



Children's work contributes to the print rich environment.

## The integrated nature of the strands and strand units of the curriculum

Strand	Strand unit	Objective
Emotional and imaginative development through language	<b>Reading</b> responding to text	experience a shared response to fiction through the use of the class novel
	<b>Oral</b> developing emotional and imaginative life through oral language	discuss a story being read and predict future events and likely outcomes in it
	<b>Writing</b> developing emotional and imaginative life through writing	write about favourite moments, characters and events in stories

Natural linkages can also be seen across the strands. The extracts from various strands for fifth and sixth classes below illustrate how objectives are clearly interdependent.

### Integration across the strands

Strand	Objective
Emotional and imaginative development through language	discuss ideas, conclusions and images encountered in literature
Competence and confidence in using language	read widely as an independent reader from a more challenging range of reading material including stories, poems, myths, legends, novels and non-fiction texts appropriate to his/her age and reading ability
Developing cognitive abilities through language	refine ideas and their expression through drafting and redrafting

By being alive to interconnections such as these the teacher can provide an integrated language experience for children. When teachers are dealing with the curriculum at first careful planning will be needed to achieve this. The new approach, which concentrates on the four strands as a context for planning and implementing the English programme, will involve considerable adjustment on the teacher's part.

## Oral language

The emphasis on oral language itself also involves a certain adjustment and, on the face of it, has immediate implications for time allocation. At first sight, this may seem a greater problem than it actually is. Because of its importance as a learning strategy, the use of oral language activity will permeate every facet of the curriculum. It is also the single most important element in realising the integrated language learning experience envisaged in the English curriculum.

Although there is an oral language strand unit in every strand many of the activities they comprise can be integrated with the work of the strand units in reading and writing. Many elements of reading and writing will involve considerable oral language work. It will have a significant role to play in such areas as

- developing reading skills
- developing comprehension skills
- developing children's response to fiction
- developing their response to poetry
- preparing a topic for writing
- editing and redrafting writing.

In this way oral language skills will be developed simultaneously with other skills and this will go some way towards addressing the problem of time allocation.

Oral language activity will also be an integral part of the teaching and learning process in all areas of the curriculum. The extent to which such an approach is successfully implemented will, in itself, have a direct bearing on the pupils' language development. This is not to say that every lesson should, first and foremost, be a language lesson. The discrete aims and objectives of any particular lesson will always be the teacher's priority.



The social function of language

It should also be remembered that there are some content objectives relating to oral language that need to be addressed per se. The objectives concerning the development and use of language in social situations, for example, will lead to very specific oral language activities. However, even these objectives cannot be separated from aspects of reading and writing: using the telephone might lead to the use of alphabetical and reading skills based on the telephone directory or to writing skills when a message has to be noted down.

A detailed discussion of the teaching of oral language is included later in the guidelines. However, there are some considerations that the teacher should keep in mind when planning the general classroom approach to the teaching of English. Much oral language development can be accomplished informally. It is important, therefore,



Listening, speaking, writing and reading are interrelated processes.

that the proper classroom atmosphere is created and maintained. Children's talk should be valued and the principle of 'talk for talk's sake' should be cultivated. Coming to the table to talk to the teacher and discussing their work with others in the class should be options that are regularly available to children. Of course, if confusion is to be avoided, some limits must be set and children need to understand that there are times when such spontaneous conversation is inappropriate. However, this too can be a feature of learning to use language in a social context.

The approach to oral language should be flexible and should incorporate the regular use of a variety of groupings within the class.

These will include whole-class, large-group, small-group and one-to-one groupings that will

- provide a variety of organisational settings to serve the needs of different activities
- allow children to use language in a variety of social groupings and contexts
- give more opportunities for individual contributions.

Such flexibility demands the careful planning of classroom layout so that the various group arrangements and group activities (including improvisational drama) can be accommodated without difficulty.

**THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA**

It is the longest wall ever built. It is over 13,000 miles long. It was built to protect the Chinese from the nomads of the north.

It was built over a period of 2,000 years. The first wall was built in 7th century BC. The last wall was built in 1644.

It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a symbol of China's history and culture.

**SARAH'S VERY FIRST DREAMS**

When I was a little girl, I had a dream. I dreamed that I was a princess. I dreamed that I had a castle and a prince.

I dreamed that I was a superhero. I dreamed that I had a cape and a mask. I dreamed that I could fly.

I dreamed that I was a scientist. I dreamed that I had a lab and a robot. I dreamed that I could invent something new.

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**Sarah's Dream**

When I was a little girl, I had a dream. I dreamed that I was a princess. I dreamed that I had a castle and a prince.

I dreamed that I was a superhero. I dreamed that I had a cape and a mask. I dreamed that I could fly.

I dreamed that I was a scientist. I dreamed that I had a lab and a robot. I dreamed that I could invent something new.

## Reading

When the school approach to the teaching of reading has been established the teacher must plan for reading in the classroom.

This will involve

- choosing the relevant graded reading materials
- assessing individual ability
- providing an appropriate programme of reading activities for each child
- keeping a record of children's reading that can be passed on to the next class teacher
- informing parents about children's progress and involving them in their children's reading activities.

The class library is very important and great thought needs to be given to the choice of books. Although the teacher will make most of the choices, the children should have some say in the inclusion of favourite books and stories and of materials of particular interest to them. This will become a more and more important feature of library planning as children approach the senior classes.

As children master the reading skills it is important that their reading experience be as varied as possible. The books available to them should encompass the best writing appropriate to their stage of development and they should be encouraged to respond to it in a variety of ways.

## Writing

The recommended approach to writing stresses the importance of the process of writing as well as the product. This will be dealt with in detail in the relevant section of *Approaches and methodologies* but in the matter of classroom planning, as with the rest of the English curriculum, the watchword should be flexibility.

This flexibility will be reflected in

- the variety of topic and genre
- the range of audience
- greater autonomy for the children in choosing the topics of their writing
- the way that time is allocated to writing
- the manner in which the writing is presented.

Flexibility should also be reflected in the materials on which children write. The use of single sheets, for example, that can be stapled together or collected in a folder will be much more appropriate to the variety of writing the children will undertake than the use of copybooks alone. This will also facilitate the effective display of children's writing.

### Assessment tools in English

- teacher observation
- teacher-designed tasks and tests
- work samples, portfolios and projects
- curriculum profiles
- diagnostic tests
- standardised tests

## Assessment in the classroom

### Purposes of assessment

Assessment will be an integral part of the teacher's classroom planning. A judicious use of assessment will enable the teacher to identify both the short-term and long-term needs of the class, of groups and of individual pupils. It will also help when organising and modifying curriculum content, and in choosing the teaching strategies and contexts that will maximise the learning of each individual child.

### A range of assessment tools

The various assessment tools appropriate to English have been outlined already under curriculum planning. Of these the last three are, obviously, more suited to long-term planning. Most schools already use standardised tests (both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced) on a regular basis. These are used, by and large, to test reading and comprehension and measure children's abilities and progress in these areas. They help the teacher to confirm judgements already made through the less structured forms of assessment and provide a more accurate picture of the child's development with reference to age or class. When children with particular needs have been identified diagnostic assessment can then be used to pinpoint particular strengths and weaknesses.

Curriculum profiles entail short descriptive statements of pupil behaviour in relation to language learning. They are standardised for different levels of achievement and are used to check children's ability in relation to each of the statements. Curriculum profiles in English have been standardised for Irish children. This form of assessment can be particularly useful in helping the teacher to assess areas of language development not otherwise readily assessed and in this way they can contribute to a fuller description of the child's development in language.

The less structured forms of assessment will be related more immediately to the day-to-day teaching and learning situation. Teacher observation will form a continuous part of the teaching process and, allied to notes the teacher may make from time to time, it can provide the mechanism which enables him/her to continually adjust the fine detail of content, teaching contexts and learning strategies. Teacher-designed tasks and tests have a similar role to play on a longer-term basis.

Of particular relevance to English is the use of work samples, portfolios and projects. These folders or portfolios may be used to collect samples of a range of the children's work over the course of a term or a year.

Portfolios could contain such items as

- samples of children's writing
- records of their reading and their responses to it

- tapes of oral presentations the children have made
- different projects that have been completed.

The sample included should be of a manageable size and should reflect the child's overall development. It should comprise a representative sample of the child's work and include, at the same time, some of the best examples. As well as being another indicator and record of the child's progress a portfolio will form part of a basis for reporting to parents. The child should be allowed some discretion in what is to be included in his/her own portfolio. For example, he/she might like to include some favourite pieces. This can play an important role in helping to develop the child's self-assessment abilities.

### Manageability of assessment

The over-use of assessment in any of its forms is counter-productive and can result in a misuse of valuable teaching time. Its principal value to the classroom teacher is to help him/her mediate the curriculum to the children in the most effective possible way.

It goes without saying, of course, that a teacher's classroom planning, whether generally or for assessment in particular, cannot take place in isolation. Although the professional discretion of the class teacher is to be respected, close co-operation with other members of staff is needed if the curriculum planning of the school is to be implemented properly.

# Sharing writing



# Approaches and methodologies

# Approaches and methodologies

## A variety of approaches

Language teaching demands a variety of approaches and methodologies. This section of the guidelines for teachers suggests some approaches that reflect the principles and priorities of the English curriculum and that can enhance children's language learning by realising the aims and learning goals of the curriculum. These approaches, however, are not intended to be exhaustive. They should be adapted as appropriate to the needs of the school, the class, the child and the teacher, and be supplemented from the teacher's own talents, expertise and experience.

## Language awareness

The strand *Receptiveness to language* is concerned with making pupils aware of the potential of language both as listeners and users. Listening is an essential element of the communicative process because it is through listening that we know what others feel, what they know, what they need, and what they want to tell us. It is important, therefore, that children's listening skills are developed and that they learn to listen actively.

Receptiveness to language involves receiving all of the meaning that the speaker or writer wishes to convey. Speech is the most common, natural and accessible means of communication. It entails the use of both language and non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, and gesture, to convey meaning.

Speech facilitates spontaneous expression. It has the immediacy of personal interaction and allows for the quick communication and reception of thought. Children use speech to express ideas, feelings and intuitions and through it they listen to the ideas, feelings, intuitions and reactions of others. In the interaction of listening and self-expression children can clarify their thoughts, modify their perceptions and expand their view of the world.

Learning how to use language for different functions in different contexts is important for both speaking and writing. In the early stages, children will write as they speak. In writing for an ever-widening audience, for different purposes and in different genres, children can learn to identify and use appropriate language in particular contexts.

Children's receptiveness to printed language is, of course, essential, for the achievement of literacy, for the development of comprehension skills. The ability to read and comprehend text will have a bearing on children's learning in every curriculum area.

In the early years at school, children's visual awareness of language can be cultivated through exposure to a rich and changing environment of print.

The extent to which children can construct meaning from text will depend, in great measure, on the quality of language they already possess and the level of their awareness of the nuances of words and phrases. However, the children's understanding of what they read can also be developed and extended through discussion. Through the writing process the teacher can consistently guide children towards appropriate forms of language and develop their sense of language awareness to the point where they can choose independently the language best suited to the particular writing task.

### The role of the teacher

As a model for the children, the teacher should be conscious of the importance of his/her own use of language and of the significance of such factors as clarity of diction, tone of voice, facial expression and gesture.

It is important that children experience challenging vocabulary and sentence structure. The teacher will also enhance the children's language development by consistently drawing their attention to new words and new meanings of words they already know. As the child matures, increasing reference can also be made to the origins and meanings of words, to the effect of a particular expression or turn of phrase and to the role of local accent and idiom.

The interaction of the teacher and the child is an essential feature in

enhancing children's language awareness. Through questioning, prompting and suggesting the teacher can expand children's vocabulary, enable them to use language more accurately and expressively, and deepen their appreciation of its communicative power. This interaction will occur in every curriculum area, so that the development of children's language awareness will be a factor of their total learning experience.

### The social context of language

The child needs to develop the appropriate language needed to perform the common social functions such as greeting, asking questions, saying goodbye and expressing appreciation and sympathy. Through the teacher's example, prompting and guidance, children will develop a sense of how to use language appropriately. As children get older, more structured and formal contexts for developing the appropriate use of language will need to be created. These contexts could include debates, presentations and interviewing interesting people.

## Creating the context for oral language

As an interactor with the children it is the teacher who creates the general context for oral language activity. This is done in two ways:

- by ensuring the desired quality and variety of stimulation in the form of ideas and topics. The child's experience, in and out of school, is the natural starting point but this, of itself, is not sufficient. The elements of content in the curriculum indicate the variety of stimuli needed for a comprehensive oral language programme
- by creating and facilitating the organisational structures in which talk can take place. These will vary with the nature and function of the activity but will consist of the various permutations of whole-class, group and one-to-one talk and discussion (both pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil).



Oral language activity is central to the curriculum.

## Whole-class and group work

Whatever the format being used, the teacher has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the talk is directed in the most effective way. In a whole-class context, while the teacher will help to give the most productive direction to the discussion, the children should be encouraged to make the major contribution.

In group and one-to-one discussion, the teacher can move from group to group prompting, questioning and suggesting in order to ensure that the maximum learning potential is derived from the particular activity or topic. A group might choose a spokesperson who would report back to the class and this, in turn, might furnish the basis for further whole-class discussion.

## Improvisational drama

Improvisational drama should be an essential element of oral language activity. Through drama, children can explore ideas, feelings, characters, actions and reactions in a way that frees them from the constraints of their immediate context and inhibitions. It can also help to create the contexts in which more formal social functions can be learned and practised. It is a teaching medium which can be used in many areas of the curriculum.

## English and the European dimension

Much of the character and power of the English language is the result of the influence of other languages in the course of its development. In their evolution from Anglo-Saxon, English vocabulary and grammar have been profoundly affected by Greek, Latin, the Scandinavian languages of the Middle Ages, Norman-French, modern European languages and, of course, Irish. This has given an enormous richness and expressive power to the language. In its turn English has influenced other European languages, especially in modern times.

It is important that children, particularly in the later stages of the primary school, are made aware of these connections. The curriculum is quite specific in this regard. It states that the child should be enabled to discuss the meanings and origins of words, phrases and expressions with the teacher. It is important, therefore, that children have the regular experience of examining the origins and history of words. This will not only increase their awareness of language but extend their knowledge, since both culture and history are reflected in the origins of words and the course of their development.

There is an obvious point of integration here with the history curriculum. The decline of Irish as a spoken language and the extent to which Irish influenced English as it is spoken in Ireland were of enormous significance in Irish history, culture and literature, as were the Viking, Norman and English settlements. The consequences for language of these events should be examined when they are being treated in the history class.

Another obvious point of contact with both Irish and other European languages is through translation into English. It is important that, in the course of their reading, children should have experience of both poetry and prose in translation from Irish and other European languages.

# Approaches to oral language

## Contexts for oral language

The child's experience of

- home
- the local environment
- the classroom
- pictures
- books
- photographs
- video
- television
- play
- story
- poetry
- rhyme
- dance
- mime

## Language activities for younger children will include

- picture matching games
- naming distinctive characteristics and attributes of people, objects, etc.
- 'I spy' games.

## Contexts for oral language

Oral language activity can be approached through five principal contexts:

- talk and discussion
- play and games
- story
- improvisational drama
- poetry and rhyme.

Talk and discussion will, of course, feature in each of the other four to a greater or lesser extent, the role of oral language in approaching poetry and rhyme is indicated in the section *Approaches to poetry* (p. 69).

## Talk and discussion

In the classroom, talk and discussion should be characterised by a relaxed atmosphere of informality which masks a well-thought-out approach to the language needs of the children. This will consist in providing a range of contexts and strategies in which appropriate language skills can be acquired. For example, children's reading, both in English and in other curriculum areas, will frequently provide a valuable basis for talk and discussion.

In learning to initiate and sustain conversations in these various contexts children need to develop an understanding of their role as speakers and listeners.

They need to have practice in

- listening attentively
- taking turns to speak
- offering the information most essential to the listener
- making comments and responses that are appropriate.

## The role of the teacher in developing active listening

Children, by and large, come to school with a considerable knowledge of language but their ability to attend actively to what is said often needs to be developed. It is important that contexts for language are created by the teacher in which the children are encouraged to listen and respond.

These may include

- learning to respond to simple instructions and directions
- story-based activities such as listening to and retelling stories, recalling particular events in a story, asking questions, and communicating the narrative through role-playing
- language games, rhymes, songs, poems and jingles through which an awareness of sounds may be fostered
- clapping and dancing to syllabic rhythms in order to further enhance the child's awareness of sounds.

### Discussion for older children will include

- local, national and international news
- other areas of the curriculum
- topics from reading
- reading material
- social issues

#### More formal occasions

- making presentations to the class
- justifying opinions
- taking part in formal debates

### A classroom framework

The teacher should adopt a collaborative, supportive and interactive role in facilitating these activities.

Children will require a classroom framework in which the teacher

- encourages children to engage in conversations in a purposeful manner
- ensures that children's contributions are valued
- acts as facilitator and mentor, helping the children to be explicit in what they say through modelling responses, thinking aloud, questioning, prompting, clarifying and extending vocabulary
- points out possible areas of meaning that the topic might embrace

- helps children to analyse and categorise these
- provides appropriate vocabulary, sentence structures, phrases and descriptive language
- creates contexts with agreed rules for discussion in which contributions are listened to and valued
- models different types of response.

### Talk and discussion in other areas of the curriculum

Many opportunities will arise for talk and discussion as part of the learning process in other areas of the curriculum. SPHE, for example, will provide a natural forum for a consideration of a variety of the issues of the day. This use of oral language activity as part of the learning process is stressed in other curriculum documents also. In mathematics, for instance, talk and discussion are central in the approach to problem-solving and in history they are featured in many of the activities. Indeed, it can be argued that the trawling of the collected knowledge of the class and reviewing it through discussion should form the prelude to the acquisition of any new concept or skill.



# Exemplar 1

## Using a children's book as a focus for talk between the teacher and small groups of children

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In this book the narrative is created through a combination of written and visual messages. The text consists of a series of rhyming couplets introducing or linking familiar story and nursery rhyme characters. This is accompanied by illustrations that provide visual clues. These extend the possibilities for the interpretation of meaning to a level of complexity far beyond anything suggested by the words. Taken at its simplest level the book is a rich source through which children's understanding of sounds, words, rhyme, rhythm and sentence structure can be developed. It also has a direct link to early literacy, through simple phrasing, through support for the text from illustrations, and through the use of repetition. These serve to give shape to the narrative and to emphasise its meaning rather than to control vocabulary.

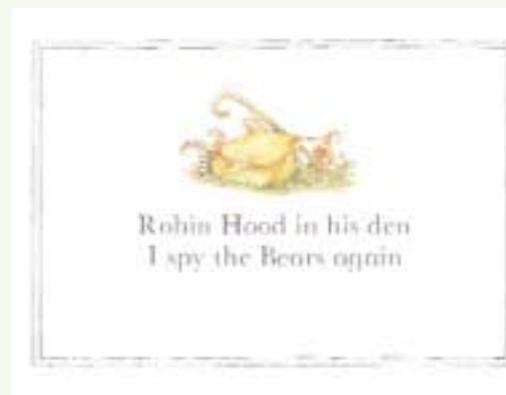
In common with many picture books its great strength lies in a capacity for provoking imaginative response and in requiring the child to explain, to construe and to construct meaning that is richly layered in the illustrations but not made explicit in the text.

Within the loosely connected narrative provided by the text the storyteller has complete responsibility for the plot development suggested in the illustrations.

The most important characteristic of the book, from which its value as a learning resource comes, is that, even when text and illustration are taken together, gaps in meaning remain that must be filled in by the reader and the listener.

To make the connections and to give the explanations the child must engage in language uses that require him/her to

- describe characters, behaviours and events
- order and sequence events
- reflect upon behaviours and emotions
- explain cause-effect relationships between events in the story
- extract central meaning in any one illustration and relate this to background and foreground events
- predict outcomes in relation to behaviours and events
- project wishes, feelings and motivations in relation to characters.



'Each Peach Pear Plum' by J. and A. Ahlberg (Picture Puffins)

*Children represent things symbolically through play.*

### Contexts for Play

#### Playing with

- sand
- blocks
- water
- the 'home corner'
- Lego
- toy human figures
- toy animals
- toy furniture
- building and construction, materials
- Plasticine
- Play Doh
- construction straws
- play house

## Play and games

Play is the natural medium through which the child exercises imagination in order to deal with feelings, situations and ideas outside his/her experience. Children, because of their limited experience and the particular stage of their conceptual development, can understand the real world only partially. In play they create a make-believe world in which they can choose and control the characters, circumstances and events, and through which they explore and try to understand the real world. This make-believe world provides the stimulus and the context through which they learn to represent things symbolically and reach conclusions about reality and its meaning.

As a learning medium play is crucial in the junior classes. It brings children from the here and now into the world of the imagination where they can use language and make-believe to explore their reactions to experiences and ideas.

## Factors affecting the content of play

There are a number of factors that will affect the content of children's play and have an influence on the range of experiences they can derive from it. Among these are

- their experience to date and their framework of reference
- the competence with which they can use language to create play contexts
- their ability to communicate ideas in play
- their ability to sustain play and extend it.

## The role of the teacher in play

The mediating role of the teacher is crucial in helping children to use imaginative play to extend and enrich their language ability and their conceptual framework. It is important, in the first place, for the teacher to provide a wide variety of materials and contexts which will facilitate children's play in the infant classroom.

Given materials and contexts children will play spontaneously. However, if they are to experience the maximum learning from it the teacher must influence it and direct it. This can be done through interacting with individual children and groups of children, contributing to the particular activity, supporting it with collaborative talk and challenging the children.

The teacher can achieve this enrichment of language by

- asking questions
- prompting new directions for the play
- suggesting possibilities
- initiating dialogue
- introducing a new child into the particular activity
- encouraging individual children to co-operate in play activity
- encouraging role-playing
- encouraging children to talk about what they are doing and to discuss it with other children.

## Learning activities in role-playing

The children should be encouraged to involve themselves in role-playing, to talk about what they are doing and to discuss it with others. In this way a number of learning activities can be created, the most obvious of which would be

- labelling—naming objects, parts of objects and the functions of objects
- making choices
- co-operating and sharing
- considering problems
- negotiating with others
- arriving at and justifying decisions
- developing and sustaining an idea
- experimenting with relationships
- adopting different roles
- exploring feelings
- re-creating their concept of the world imaginatively.

# Exemplar 2

## Using play to develop cognitive abilities through oral language

---

The acquisition and use of language plays a primary role in the child's developing intellectual abilities. In the early years of primary school qualitative changes in his/her thought processes can be effected through the mediating function of language.

Language clarifies images and facilitates the cognitive organisation of concepts and ideas. In the infant classes, through language and through the teacher-child relationship, the child constantly constructs and progressively modifies conceptual thought by interpreting experience.

The teacher must structure activities that allow him/her to interact with the children. He/she should support and challenge them through talk that is collaborative in nature and that requires the child to consider people, objects, actions, relationships and ideas, and to talk about them with increasing levels of complexity. This interaction of language and experience assists cognitive development. The following exemplar illustrates the type of language use that can be encouraged through play activity in different curriculum areas.

### Activity

### Children might be prompted to say

Naming objects

I have a teddy.

---

Describing objects in terms of their distinguishing

- characteristics properties
- associations, functions
- colour, shape, size, material

This is the elephant that has a trunk and lives in Africa.  
This is the bucket for making a sand castle.  
This is the small red block. It's square and made of wood.

---

Describing the relationship of the child to the object

I can climb, wheel, roll, tumble.

---

Planning and saying how he/she will use materials

I'm going to bounce and kick the ball.  
I'm going to make two big sand castles and two small sand castles.  
I'm going to climb to the top of the frame.  
I'm going to telephone the doctor and say my brother is sick.

---

Sorting and categorising materials	<p>I'm going to sort the red and blue beads to make a necklace.</p> <p>I'm collecting all the Lego.</p> <p>I'm sorting the blue beads and the red pegs.</p> <p>I'm choosing pairs that look like one another.</p> <p>I'm picking pairs that are the same size.</p> <p>I'm remembering all the nursery rhymes I know.</p> <p>I'm listing all the stories I know.</p>
Matching in one-to-one correspondence	<p>I'm putting each cup with a saucer.</p> <p>I'm choosing a chair for each teddy.</p>
Recalling and describing activities	<p>First I played on the mat, then I tumbled and rolled, then I rode the bicycle and I pretended I was riding down a big hill.</p>
Planning and discussing activities to come	<p>I'm going to build an aeroplane.</p> <p>I think we should use the big blocks because.....</p> <p>We will need three seats because.....</p> <p>If we need more room we can.....</p>
Persuading, explaining and justifying	<p>I'd rather play with the sand because I want to use the new sand bucket.</p> <p>We haven't got enough blocks to make our tower as high as the window.</p> <p>We've already got a traffic warden; will you be the doctor and visit the sick children?</p>
Describing an experience	<p>I've built Rapunzel's tower.</p>
Using language in moving from make-believe play to drama	<p>We're travelling in our spaceship.</p> <p>We're going to discover .....</p>

## Story

The telling and reading of stories should be a feature of children's experience in every class. Throughout their school lives they should have the opportunity to listen, on a regular basis, to a rich and varied selection of stories.

### The importance of story

Listening to stories is important in a number of ways:

- For young children it is their first and principal access to the world of literature and the imagination.
- Through listening to stories they gain an awareness and an appreciation of the structure of narrative, learning about sequence and cause and effect.
- If told in language that is colourful and challenging or read from the works of good writers stories can help expand vocabulary.
- Stories can give children an appreciation of the potential of language and develop their own use of language.
- Listening to stories can help them with their own storytelling.
- Listening to stories improves listening and attending skills.
- Discussing events, characters, motives and consequences in stories assists cognitive, imaginative and emotional development.

*The telling and reading of stories should be a feature of children's experience in every class.*

## Storytelling

The quality of storytelling or story reading is important. Whether read or told, a thorough preparation is necessary if a story is to have the maximum impact on the children because, in a real sense, it requires a performance on the part of the teacher.

Consideration should be given to

- the narrative flow
- the mood of the story
- the dramatic highlights and climaxes
- dialogue, if any
- appropriate variations of voice and pace.

If the teacher has a facility with accent so much the better but this is not essential for a story to be effective. A useful variation is to let the children occasionally hear recordings of professional readers and storytellers or to invite a local story-teller to visit the class and tell stories. Although stories can be read or told with no other purpose than to provide an enjoyable listening experience they can also stimulate valuable oral language activity, writing and follow-up reading. A variety of response should be encouraged. One form of response is illustrated in Exemplar 3, p. 47. Children should also be encouraged to find similar or contrasting stories in books in the class library and to read them silently or aloud to the class.

## Language activities and stories

### Children should engage in a variety of responses such as

- asking questions
- answering questions
- repeating appropriate lines of dialogue
- using tone of voice to highlight moods and particular events
- re-creating characters, events and emotions in role playing
- miming stories and parts of stories
- describing different characters
- re-telling the story
- re-telling particular incidents in the story
- recalling different words and phrases
- recalling lines of dialogue
- discussing why characters said certain things
- acting out incidents in the story
- miming the story

### More sophisticated responses can be expected from older children who could

- retell the story, concentrating on its most important elements
- take turns retelling it
- choose the most important features of the story and compare their choices with those of others
- discuss words or phrases that are particularly colourful, striking or informative
- mime the story to stress mood and emotion
- recall details of characters and events
- summarise the story
- compare it with other stories heard or read

### Other activities

#### *Writing activities in which children*

- write the story in their own words
- write about a character
- write about what they liked best in the story
- write the story from the point of view of one of the characters
- write a new ending to the story
- write a sequel
- write what happened before the story began

#### *Listening to stories can encourage children*

- to tell their own stories, choosing their own subject
- to tell a story about given characters
- to listen to the beginning of a story and develop it themselves
- to tell or write a story in collaboration with others
- to tell or write a story about characters they have encountered in their reading

# Exemplar 3

## A sample of extension work based on a story

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This activity could be used as a follow-up to a reading of the story of Rapunzel. The activity, building a tower using blocks, provides the context for a variety of language use ranging from the simple to the complex. Much of the language development in the lesson is related to the development of thinking skills.

This activity is designed for a group of children and requires them to co-operate and communicate with each other in order to achieve the purpose of the activity.

### Suggested activities

In collaboration with the teacher the children can

- discuss the tower in terms of its height, shape, location, purpose
- name, recall or compare other towers, local buildings, other stories, nursery rhymes
- estimate how high their tower blocks should be or will be
- suggest suitable materials
- plan, discuss and agree a strategy as to who will be responsible for different aspects of the activity
- propose ways of including windows, doors, stairs
- draw a picture
- describe the on-going process
- sustain the idea with reference to the plan and to the agreed strategy
- develop the imaginary context by possibly adding play people, toy animals or vehicles to create a narrative related to the tower
- sustain a coherent narrative thread, assigning roles to play people, describing a sequence of events, imputing motives and predicting outcomes.



Building a tower—a context for cognitive development through language

### Further extension work

In a follow-up activity, in collaboration with the teacher, the children could be encouraged to

- recall and relate the factual account of the activity and retell the story they created—perhaps taking responsibility for different parts of the work and telling different parts of the story
- write and illustrate these
- read them aloud to other children.

## Drama and the promotion of listening skills

Sample activities for younger children

- in pairs, one child could be him/herself and the other an animal—a dog or cat perhaps. It might be suggested that the animal comes in very wet, or with a mouse maybe, and would react to different commands, reprimands, expressions of sympathy etc.
- groups could be formed—one child could be the teacher and the others react to different orders, suggestions etc.
- groups could be formed in which two children could be Mammy and Daddy.

## Improvisational drama

### The role of drama

The curriculum envisages a central role for improvisational drama in oral language activity in every class. Because language is central to every area of the curriculum, it will form a dimension of children's learning experience in areas other than language and the arts.

Although drama can be a powerful teaching strategy it is important to remember that it is an activity and an experience that has a discrete value of its own. It has a contribution to make to the development of the child that is quite independent of any learning objective for which it may be used in any particular curriculum area. This dimension of drama should be kept in mind at all times. In other words the specific learning that might accrue from an experience of drama in SESE, for example, will be only a part of the benefit the child will gain from it.

### Drama in the primary curriculum

Drama has a number of specific characteristics which mean that it can make a unique contribution to the development of the child.

### Drama

- is a holistic activity. It involves every aspect of the child's personality: spiritual, moral, emotional, mental

and physical. It is through bringing all of these into play, as children interact and create an imaginative world, that the potential for development lies. In the combined engagement of different facets of the child's psyche, as he/she experiences the exploration of imaginary situations and contexts, new insights are born and self-knowledge is revealed

- is an open-ended, creative activity. In a drama lesson certain contexts, situations, characters, conflicts, dilemmas, etc. may be suggested to the children. The teacher may indeed prompt the children towards a particular facet of the exploration but essentially the development should spring from their own creativity and imagination. Their interaction with each other in the roles they play, in the attitudes they adopt and in the feelings they live and express can lead them to new perceptions and intuitions which, in turn, fuel new developments in the situation being played

It is in this creative, unpredictable, open-ended nature of drama that much of its value resides. It is from this, too, that all its cognitive and affective educational benefits derive. In controlling and deciding how the particular drama experience develops, the children not only fulfil their own needs but acquire an ownership that makes it all the more valuable to them.

## Drama and the development of social skills

Sample contexts for middle classes

- a visitor comes to the house
- a visitor comes to the classroom
- a visit to the hospital
- going to a house in which someone is dead

## Cognitive, emotional, and imaginative development through drama

Children can

- respond to stories and characters in stories
- play characters from a story in another situation
- explore how a character would react if a particular event had not happened
- respond to fiction and poetry
- express feelings and attitudes
- express conflicts of opinion
- explore ideas
- explore historical events
- argue a case or justify an attitude.

- has a fictional focus. It is in its imaginative dimension that the essence of improvisational drama lies. Children create new personalities and by projecting themselves imaginatively into them. They attain a 'new reality'. A dimension of experience denied to them in normal life becomes available to them in the only way possible—through living it in their imagination. This experience—this 'new reality'—brings them into contact with new ideas, different emotional experience and fresh knowledge
- a quest for knowledge. Children can attain new knowledge and learn new skills through drama, and in school it can be used for this purpose. More importantly, they come to new insights and perceptions not only about themselves but about other people, the nature of social interaction and the issues that arise from it. Such knowledge is attainable only through the specific methods of enquiry that drama uses. Every drama lesson has the potential for language development. The range of the language and the purposes for which it is used will vary with the particular situation being explored but language is intrinsic to it.

## Drama and the development of skills

In the curriculum statement the integration of drama with English is indicated in twenty or more content

objectives. For younger children, for example, it suggests the use of role play to develop active listening skills. It also recommends the use of improvisational drama in developing children's ability to use language in social functions such as greeting, saying goodbye, etc.

The curriculum also suggests that drama has a particular affinity with activities directed towards cognitive, emotional and imaginative development. A number of content objectives recommend the use of improvisational drama, in particular those in which children will explore and respond to stories, fiction, poetry and other expressions of feelings, attitudes and opinions. These can provide a rich context for improvisational drama.

In any of the drama exercises which explore these situations it is essential that children

- think and feel themselves into the situation
- imagine and play the characters as they really might be
- express emotions and actions in detail and with conviction.

The methods of enquiry that improvisational drama posits are contingent on this idea of an intense engagement with the characters and situations. Without such an engagement the exercise would lack truth and, in all probability, be fruitless from a learning point of view.

# Approaches to reading

## Language development activities

- developing listening and speaking skills
- providing a stimulus for imaginative play
- providing cues for telling and retelling stories

## Environmental print

- the names of familiar shops
- signs
- logos
- slogans
- advertisements

The curriculum assumes a considerable change in the approach to reading. Firstly, it envisages that the early stages of reading will be grounded firmly on the child's general language experience. This presupposes that oral language activities will provide the basis for the child's preparation for reading. This will, progressively, involve the child in the creation and reading of oral-based texts and in the collaborative reading of large format books. Building on this foundation of language activity the child will learn to use a number of cueing strategies that will enable him/her to read and understand an increasingly complex range of text.

It is a fundamental principle of the curriculum that the child's language competence, attention span, concentration and perceptual abilities should be well developed before being introduced to a formal reading scheme. Consequently, much of the English programme in the child's first year at school will be devoted to oral language and informal reading activities.

## A print-rich environment

It is important that, from the first day at school, the child is encouraged to see books and reading materials as exciting, pleasurable and interesting. The infant classroom should be organised in a way that facilitates interaction between children and books and develops their curiosity about print.

Creating a print-rich environment involves more than a simple labelling of objects in the classroom. The regular use of job charts, weather charts and posters, for example, in which words, phrases or even sentences change very regularly will help to focus the child's attention on the written word and he/she can be encouraged to respond appropriately.

Environmental print in the neighbourhood can also be explored and the addition of directories, newspapers and magazines to a play corner will encourage children to engage in play activities that resemble real-life reading activities.

An important element of the print environment is the regular display of the children's writing, whether on the classroom walls or as items in the classroom library. As such it can become part of the children's reading material and provide stimulation to the reader and encouragement for the writer.

*The infant classroom should be organised in a way that allows children to handle and browse through books.*

### The library corner in the junior classes

Ideally every infant and junior classroom should have a library corner, a focal point and space where groups of children meet together to talk, listen and read. This area might be furnished with carpet or rugs and cushions or bean-bags. Posters and display books that are changed on a regular basis, along with examples of children's art work, will help to lend atmosphere to the library corner.

Books should be displayed face out where possible so that cover illustration, title and author are clearly visible. The child should be encouraged to browse in the library corner and to share books in pairs or in small groups. These will be picture books mainly, ranging from picture-only books to books with pictures and captions to books with an increasing amount of text. Flap books, pop-up books, alphabet and counting books, along with collections of nursery rhymes, verse and illustrated folk and fairy tales, will be popular with this age group.



Browsing in the class library

## A check-list for selecting books for the school library

The collection should include

- stories that the children enjoy
- simple collections of poems, rhymes, and narrative, humorous and lyrical verse
- books which feature both males and females in leading roles
- books which reflect the background and culture of all the children in the class
- books which reflect a variety of domestic and environmental backgrounds
- simple information books, clearly illustrated and presented
- books with information presented in photographic and simple diagrammatic form
- books that cater for children's individual interests
- large-format books, both fiction and non-fiction.

Books should have

- a coherent story structure
- clear characterisation
- richness and variety of language
- repetitive sentence structures, sequences and refrains
- illustrations that complement and extend the text.

## Books for school libraries

### For younger children:

- picture books
- short books that can be read at one sitting
- poetry anthologies
- collections of short stories
- a wide range of information books
- dictionaries
- periodicals suited to the interests and age levels of the children

### For older readers:

- a wide range of fiction
- biography
- non-fiction books that will cater for a wide variety of interests
- poetry
- anthologies
- plays
- reference books
- newspapers, magazines and periodicals.

*Every opportunity should be taken to excite children's interest in reading.*

## The classroom library for older children

As the child matures and progresses, the classroom library will evolve naturally from the library corner and the range of reading material will be extended to include a wider variety of genres. The importance of the classroom library in enriching the child's reading experience cannot be over-emphasised. It is generally accepted that it should contain a minimum of twelve books per pupil.

The child should take an active part in the organisation of the classroom library, and whenever possible he/she should visit a local public library and become familiar with its layout and organisation.



Uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading in the local library can complement classroom approaches.

Ideally, the organisation of the classroom library should be loosely based on that of the public library, in classifying fiction alphabetically by author and information books by subject.

The ability to locate and self-select books for independent reading or in pursuing an individual interest lays the foundation for a successful engagement with books during USSR periods (uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading). The classroom library should also cater for all levels of interest and ability so that every child will experience success and enjoyment in reading independently.

Every opportunity should be taken to excite pupils' interest in reading. Inviting authors of children's books, poets and storytellers to the classroom and organising book-related events helps stimulate a child's interest in books and reading.

The child should be encouraged to express preferences for genres, authors or books on particular topics. Children should be encouraged to become members of the public library, thus giving themselves access to an even wider range of reading material and a valuable resource for independent reading experience.

### Informal reading activities

- Introducing children to the characters and settings in the story books
- enabling children to label the characters and elements of the setting
- allowing the children to experience the teacher modelling the reading process
- developing concepts of print such as words, letters, top-bottom and left-right orientation
- developing basic sight vocabulary

## Learning to read

The curriculum envisages that the approach to reading will be grounded firmly in the child's general language experience. Oral language activity will have a crucial role to play in preparing the child to read. Building on a base of general language competence, phonological and phonemic awareness will be fostered and he/she will be encouraged to use a range of word-identification strategies in learning to extract meaning from the text. This will also entail extensive oral language work. In essence, this means that the child will not be expected to engage with a structured reading scheme until his/her general language competence is strong enough to support reading development.

In his/her first year in school the child should have a rich experience of oral language activity, including rhymes, riddles and games designed to develop his/her phonological and phonemic awareness. The child should become thoroughly familiar with print in the environment and engage in plenty of collaborative reading with the teacher using both language experience material and large-format books.

If the child has such a language experience during his/her initial period in school the curriculum envisages that, by and large, he/she can begin a structured reading programme some time during senior infant class.

## Using language experience materials and large format books

These can provide a springboard for a variety of language activities that help to develop language skills and to provide the language base the child needs before embarking on a structured programme of reading.

- large-format books, or 'big books' as they are more familiarly called, are, as their name suggests, books which are produced in format large enough to use for collaborative reading with groups
- language experience charts are created collaboratively by the teacher and the children. The teacher records what the children have to say on a large sheet of chart paper.

# Exemplar 4

## Using experience charts as a basis for children's early contact with reading

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A language experience chart enables the child's oral expression to be given the permanence of public print.

This approach to learning to read has a number of features to commend it:

- it enables the child to tell and later to read personal experiences
- it provides the teacher with an opportunity to model writing and reading for the children
- it caters for individual differences among children
- it integrates listening, speaking, reading and writing and can be used with individuals, groups or the whole class.

Unplanned opportunities for language development will arise frequently through chance happenings, for example a butterfly, a bee or a wasp in the classroom. These happenings can provide the basis for the authentic recording of the child's language. However, occasions can also be planned and used as a stimulus for language work. 'Our news' is frequently used to encourage children to recall and recount events, but this should not be the only source of talk. Other examples could include a nature walk, a visit to a park or playground, a visitor to the classroom (postperson, doctor, nurse) or a video. These can all be used to stimulate narrative, description, discussion and dialogue.

Following questions, answers, discussion and comment about a particular event or incident the teacher can ask individual children what they would like him/her to write about the event or incident. The teacher then records what the children have to say on a large sheet of chart paper naming the letters as he/she writes. These sentences should match as closely as possible what the children say. The teacher should avoid the temptation to embellish the children's sentences.

Initially, the teacher and the children read together what has been written, focusing on initial letters, 'special' words, and print features such as top-to-bottom and left-to-right orientation. Later, when the children have acquired some concepts of reading, groups and individual children should be asked to help the teacher to read the chart. After reading there should be plenty of discussion, giving the children opportunities to ask and answer questions. The chart should be kept and reread frequently at intervals. A number of related charts can be put together to make a book and this can be kept in the library corner or class library.

*Unplanned opportunities for language development will arise frequently through chance happenings.*

# Exemplar 5

## Using large-format books as a basis for structured reading

Large-format books provide excellent materials for early structured reading in small-group situations and facilitate the transition to similar books in smaller format. The teacher can read the narrative with the children and, as familiarity with the content is established, they can move on to read words, phrases, sentences and whole pages with the teacher and then on their own.

At a later stage the children may start by attempting to read the material themselves. In either case the teacher will guide them towards independent reading by prompting them to use various word identification strategies.

It is important to remember that at the early stages of reading and before the child has attained independence as a reader, he/she relies heavily on semantic and syntactic cueing strategies. In guiding the child through the text the teacher should help him/her to use these to interpret the text. This will involve using

- questions to establish prior knowledge
- pictures to predict
- context to predict.

These activities can be complemented with work to develop their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships. It is important that this is done in the context of dealing with the text and is used interactively with what they can interpret using the other cues. Using the text as a stimulus, word families can be created from initial consonants, for example:

man, mouse, made.

Similarly, letter substitution will help to develop phonological and phonemic awareness, for example:

may, pay, stay, play.

In the reading process attention and interest should also concentrate on the function and effect of such features as commas and direct speech. By adverting to the different features of books such as title, page numbers, table of contents, author and so on, children will gradually become familiar with their functions and names. When the child can read the text independently he/she can share it with others by reading it aloud, and the teacher can monitor the accuracy of the reading.

After reading there should be further plentiful discussion of the text. This should stimulate the children to

- recall details and significant events in the text
- establish the sequence of events
- establish cause and effect
- predict
- make comparisons.

*After reading there should be further plentiful discussion of the text.*



Shared reading using a large-format book

## Knowledge of the conventions of print

The child needs to understand that there are certain directional and positional conventions in print:

- a line of text is read from left to right
- the letters in a word are read from left to right
- text is read from top to bottom
- words are separated by spaces
- punctuation marks play a role in text.

## Basic sight vocabulary

Basic sight vocabulary is an important element of the language base the child needs before beginning a structured reading programme. It will be acquired from a number of sources, such as

- language experience material
- large-format books
- environmental print
- labelling
- flash cards.

It is important to stress that even when children have begun to use a reading scheme they need a richer reading experience than a reading scheme alone will give. There is a wide range of reading material available that can be used to supplement a reading scheme. The child should not only read independently at his/her own level but also have the opportunity to read and reread easy material and also attempt more challenging text with the help of the teacher.

## Word identification strategies

Reading is a complex activity and in order to become a competent reader the child has to become proficient in recognising and identifying words. In order to acquire the ability to identify words speedily and fluently he/she needs to use information from different sources.

These sources of information, or cueing strategies, are based on the child's

- knowledge of letter-sound relationships (grapho/phonic cues)
- experiences and understanding of the world (meaning or semantic cues)
- knowledge of the forms of language (syntactic cues)
- knowledge of the directional and positional conventions of print
- awareness of the function of punctuation marks.

When the child is reading independently he/she uses these cues to

- predict
- identify
- confirm/self-correct.

## Sound-letter relationships (grapho/phonic cues)

The child uses a knowledge of the sounds of letters and groups of letters and his/her skill at combining these sounds to interpret print.

*In order to acquire the ability to identify words speedily and fluently he/she needs to use information from different sources.*

### Phonological and phonemic awareness

In acquiring the ability to use sound-letter relationships (grapho/phonetic cues) the child needs to develop phonological and phonemic awareness, that is, an ability to manipulate the sound segments in words.

Activities such as the following can contribute to the development of this ability:

- saying and hearing nursery rhymes and rhymed stories
- reproducing rhymes
- clapping and dancing to syllabic rhythms
- playing 'I spy' games involving onsets and rimes
- segmenting of sentences into individual words
- segmenting of words into syllables
- matching the length of a word to its utterance.

### Onset and rime

Young children find it relatively easy to segment words into syllables. For example, at an early stage most children can segment the word 'cartoon' into its constituent syllables. The child should have plenty of practice in identifying syllables and in developing the facility of analysing the constituent sounds of words. What he/she finds much more difficult to understand is that the word 'car', for example, can be segmented into

three phonemes (the smallest units of sound that can change the meaning of a word). He/she finds it easier to segment a syllable into parts greater than a phoneme. This can be done by isolating the two elements onset and rime. The onset is the part of the syllable that precedes the vowel; the rime is the remainder of the syllable. All syllables must have a rime but not all need have an onset. Some examples are:

Word	Onset	Rime
at		-at
him	h-	-im
shop	sh-	-op
stand	st-	-and
strand	str-	-and
say	s-	-ay

Onset-rime knowledge can also help in developing awareness of spelling patterns by introducing analogy through word families which share the same spelling and rime. For example, a very young child can deduce the pronunciation of one word by comparing it with another with the same rime (a child can read 'sand' if he/she knows 'hand'). Children should be encouraged to explain how they recognise the new word with reference to the old.

*The onset is the part of the syllable that precedes the vowel; the rime is the remainder of the syllable.*

Using onsets and rimes has several advantages:

- vowel sounds are very stable within rimes. In other words, most rimes sound the same in every word in which they are found
- rimes are easily learned, regardless of the vowel they contain: for example, rimes containing long vowel sounds are learned as easily as those containing short vowel sounds
- about 500 primary-level words can be derived from the following set of only 37 rimes

-ack -all -ain -ake -ale -ame -an  
 -ank -ap -ash -at -ate -aw -ay  
 -eat -ell -est -ice -ick -ide -ight  
 -ill -in -ine -ing -ink -ip -it  
 -ock -oke -op -ore -ot -uck -ug  
 -ump -unk

- any familiar words can be used for an introduction to shared rimes. For instance, if the words 'ball' and 'take' occur in large format book reading, the class can think of words that rhyme with them. The teacher can then demonstrate that these words are written with the same spelling pattern for the rime (for example, c-all, h-all, t-all and b-ake, c-ake, l-ake). Plastic letters can be used to make up any rime that has arisen in reading, or even non-reading, activity. The teacher can then demonstrate that different onsets can be grafted onto the same rime and that shared rime has consistent spelling.

### *Semantic cues*

The child uses semantic or meaning cues to predict the text. For example, knowledge and experience would enable him/her to predict the last word in the sentence

The boy was tired, so he went to ...

### *Syntactic cues*

The child's oral language gives him/her some understanding of the grammar and usage of language. In the sentence John threw the ...

he/she would expect the last word to be a noun.

### Predicting and checking

The child uses sight vocabulary and significant details of print to sample text and to make predictions. Young readers, because their word identification skills are not yet developed, rely heavily on semantic and syntactic cues to predict but they will use all the cues to check the accuracy of their predictions.

They use

- semantic cues to check if their predictions make sense
- syntactic cues to check if it 'sounds right'
- a knowledge of the conventions of print to check if there is word-by-word fit
- letter-sound relationships to check if their predictions are right.

As the child gets older the relative importance of the different cueing strategies in helping him/her to read will shift. He/she will still use syntactic and semantic cues but increasingly grapho/phonic skills assume the predominant role in the process of word identification.

### Confirming and self-correcting

Children need to develop all of the strategies just outlined if they are to read successfully. They should be encouraged to take risks when predicting in order to develop the technique of confirming and self-correcting and should be allowed to work out things for themselves.

Children can best develop the ability to predict, check, confirm and self-correct by having their attention drawn to the appropriate cues. If inaccurate reading is corrected too quickly by the teacher or by another pupil the child will be denied the opportunity to learn for him/herself.

On the other hand, the child can accept responsibility for his/her own learning if the teacher asks questions such as:

- does that seem right?
- how can you be sure?
- what word would make sense here?
- what word would look right here?
- what does the picture tell you?
- what do you think the story is going to be about?

Written and oral cloze procedures can also be used to develop prediction strategies:

The girl sat on a . . .

(semantic/syntactic)

The girl sat on ch . . .

(grapho/phonic)

Similarly, the teacher can encourage the child to confirm/self-correct by making suggestions such as:

- read from the beginning and think what would fit
- leave out the word, read on, and think what would make sense
- does that make sense?
- are you sure?
- how do you know for certain?
- what does your word begin with?
- does the word on the page begin like that?

If a child is having difficulty with a sentence it can be very useful to encourage him/her to read it silently. This allows the child to work out the meaning of the text quietly in his/her own time and without pressure. It also gives the opportunity to practise using the different cueing strategies to solve a difficulty. Furthermore, when the child experiences success in interpreting the text it can greatly increase his/her confidence as a reader.

These essential strategies and attitudes are best developed through the child's engagement with texts that have a special meaning for him/her, that use natural language and that he/she enjoys reading.

It is important, of course, that unrecognised words are in the children's speaking or listening vocabulary before he/she is expected to apply these strategies in order to recognise them.

## Comprehension

### Comprehension skills

In learning to extract meaning from the text it is important that children's higher comprehension skills are developed. Traditionally, particularly in middle and senior classes, there has been a strong reliance on written exercises (especially those in class readers and workbooks) in developing comprehension skills. They can, however, be developed much more effectively through discussion of the text under the guidance and prompting of the teacher. This is not to say that written response to texts of various kinds does not have its place, particularly in senior classes. However, children's comprehension skills should be developed mainly through oral language activity.

The ultimate objective of reading is comprehension or the reconstruction of meaning. The meaning, or at least

the full meaning, may not emerge immediately. It grows gradually and in the process is redefined, revised and reformulated by the reader when he/she engages in reading the text and in reflecting on it. This entails much more than mere word recognition. From the beginning of reading children will recall and retell details of what they read, and predict possible future outcomes. However, as they mature and deal with texts of increasing complexity they need to develop skills such as analysis, synthesis, inference, deduction, summarisation, evaluation and correlation if they are to divine the full meaning of the text. The curriculum envisages the development of these higher comprehension skills from the middle classes onwards. To acquire them children will need a consistent and structured experience of questioning, discussing and probing the text in order to arrive at its full meaning.

### Comprehending a range of texts

Texts fall into three categories:

- expository
- narrative
- diagrammatic or representational.

Narrative and expository texts have different purposes and structures. Narrative texts are mainly concerned with telling a story while the principal function of expository texts is to inform

### Comprehension skills

- understanding
- analysis
- deduction
- summarisation
- inference
- prediction
- confirmation
- synthesis
- evaluation
- correlation

*Comprehension skills are best developed through discussion of the text.*

and explain. Diagrammatic or representational text (sometimes referred to as documents) includes lists, graphs, diagrams, tables, maps, pictorial representation, and many other forms of text designed to present or illustrate information.

All three involve both the cognitive and affective responses of the children. Whereas a range of comprehension skills will be used with any of the three, affective response is associated mainly with narrative text and poetry. This is dealt with in the sections Response to text and Poetry.

No comprehension skill is used in isolation from the others. They all interconnect in assisting the reader to reconstruct meaning in the text. They will not be developed effectively through exercises or assignments based on the individual skills such as are found in many workbooks and class readers. It is through reading the text, reflecting on it, discussing it and writing about it that the comprehension skills are best developed.



Information retrieval skills are central to learning in every curriculum area.

Comprehension tasks, therefore, should be purposeful and authentic. There should be a direct connection between the tasks undertaken by the pupils and the purposes for which the texts have been devised.

### The teacher's role

The teacher's role in comprehension will involve planning appropriate contexts that will encourage children to reflect while reading. It will involve enabling and stimulating the children, and developing and improving the quality of reflection through modelling, instruction and application.

Children will, consequently, undertake a range of activities including:

- understanding the word, phrase and sentence meaning of the text
- using contextual clues for word meaning
- using dictionaries to check meaning
- recognising, recalling and inferring specific details
- recognising, recalling and inferring comparisons
- recognising, recalling and inferring cause-and-effect relationships
- reorganising, classifying and summarising details
- interpreting figurative language and imagery
- reacting to the author's use of language
- identifying with characters, events and issues.

## Comprehension strategies

Because children read for different purposes they will need to learn to use a number of different reading strategies:

- scanning the text—to examine its structure and layout
- skimming the text—to gain the overall gist of what it is about
- search-reading—to locate information
- reflective reading—involving critical reading and re-reading.

It is important that the teacher varies the organisational groupings in the class to suit the particular activity.

These will include

- whole-class activity—in prediction, for example
- large or small groups—in sequencing activities, for example
- paired work—in the location and organisation of information, for example
- individualised study—in reflective reading, for example
- conferencing between pupil and teacher—in understanding problems, for example.

In approaching text and in learning to use comprehension skills, children should experience a balance of appropriate activities including listening tasks, oral response, purposeful reading and written response. Of these, the first three should be a part of nearly

all activities designed to develop comprehension skills. This will be particularly true in junior and middle classes. The use of written response will be greater in senior classes but, in almost all cases, it should be used as a follow-up to discussion and other forms of oral response.

## Comprehension and oral language

Oral language activity will be at the core of the programme for developing children's comprehension skills and will involve teacher and pupil questions and plenty of discussion and debate on the text. The teacher should also model comprehension skills through thinking aloud and teaching the children how to use questions to gain the maximum amount of information from the text. This will be supplemented by activities that will involve the other modes of response and include

- sequencing tasks
- prediction assignments
- cloze procedures
- interpretation through mime, drama, painting etc.
- personal writing response
- study reading
- survey, question, read, recall, review (SQ3R)
- location and organisation of information
- finding word meanings from context.

*Children should engage actively with the text.*

## Comprehension and text

In developing their comprehension skills children will be encouraged to engage with the text in three phases:

- surveying prior knowledge before reading the text
- reflecting while reading the text
- responding to the text after reading it.

### *Before reading the text*

Children should be given the opportunity to recall and review what they already know of the subject matter of the text and this can lead to their surveying and predicting what knowledge might be gained from it.

### *Reflecting while reading*

This involves the habit of engaging actively with the text, which is a facility children don't necessarily have but can develop. Children should, of course, be allowed to read both short and longer texts silently without interruption so that they can develop the skill of reflecting actively on what they are reading as they read it.

They should be encouraged to

- identify details and relate them to their own experience
- identify the order of events as presented
- look for cause-and-effect relationships
- examine solutions to problems
- look for comparisons and contrasts

- identify facts in tables and charts
- look for the explanation of technical terms and unfamiliar words in the context, glossary or dictionary.

Some of these activities will take place in breaks during the reading of the text. Others may be merely brought to the children's attention and used for discussion later because this phase will often spill over into the third phase. In either case it helps to cultivate in children the habit of continuous, conscious reflection on the text as they read it.

### *Responding to the text after reading it*

This phase follows naturally from *Reflecting while reading* and will also involve the activities listed above. A variety of strategies for stimulating response can be used: discussion, open and closed questions, retelling, summarising. Activities that could be added to those listed already (not all of which might be appropriate to every text) would include

- identifying words, phrases or sentences that signal an idea, an opinion, a deduction, the solution to a problem, new information, etc. For example, 'Read the sentence which proves ...'
- justifying opinions and arguments from the text
- identifying, questioning, reflecting and discussing main ideas and issues

- discussing the characteristics and uses of different genres—biography, information books, anthologies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.
- undertaking organisational tasks involving sequencing, categorising and outlining
- undertaking information retrieval tasks using a range of reference and information books as sources. This will involve the use of book titles, summaries, tables of contents, indexes, etc. and will include activities such as listing, tabulation, webbing, diagrams, notes, graphs, lines of development, etc.
- following written instructions in undertaking a task, for example making a kite
- undertaking tasks in recording information from diagrams, tables, maps, guides, etc.
- science—solving problems, analysing cause and effect, predicting, deducing
- SPHE—exploring attitudes, ethical issues, moral decisions
- project work—locating and organising information, taking notes, listing, summarising, correlating
- maths—reading, prediction and deduction
- PE—interpreting instructions.

## Responding to text

### Experiencing and responding to a wide range of text

The curriculum also gives particular consideration to children's reading needs after they have achieved some mastery of reading skills. The reading scheme needs to be supplemented with other material. The class reader on its own will not cater adequately for the child's reading needs. These will be fulfilled through the experience of engaging with a wide and varied range of text. The consistent use of well-stocked and regularly supplemented school and class libraries will be crucial in providing this experience.

### Comprehension in other curricular areas

There are extensive possibilities for integration with other areas of the curriculum in developing children's comprehension skills. This is particularly true of middle and senior classes when children are engaging with a widening range of texts of increasing complexity in areas such as

- history—as has been indicated elsewhere
- geography—exploring and interpreting maps, tables, graphs, etc.

*There are extensive opportunities for integration with other areas of the curriculum in developing comprehension skills.*

*Reading aloud to children is a crucially important activity.*

*Children should experience a shared response to fiction.*

## Sharing a response to books and other text

As children begin to read and as their reading develops they will be able to experience a greater variety of text and this will be reflected in a widening of their responses. At this stage they should be encouraged to share their individual choices of books and other reading materials with others. This may be done informally as they browse in the book corner or more formally when a child is called upon to sit in the 'reader's chair' or 'book chair' and speak for two or three minutes about a book he/she has read. Other children or the teacher might like to question him/her about characters, events, favourite moments, likes and dislikes. In this way children are recommending and 'reviewing' books and poems orally, the form of response that is most immediate and accessible to them.

As their skill in writing develops they will be able to complete sentences such as 'My favourite character is ...' or 'I liked the part when ...' and give reasons for such choices. Simple records of reading can be kept by recording such details as author, title, comment and 'star rating'. Writing can also be integrated with visual arts when children write a blurb for a book jacket or a motto for a book-mark.

As they mature children will continue to respond to their reading through discussion, writing, visual arts and drama.

The importance of giving children ample opportunities to respond orally to what they read cannot be over-emphasised. Talk and discussion about plot, character and motive should form a significant part of children's response to reading throughout the primary school years.

## Using a class novel

Serial reading of a class novel provides a particularly important means by which children can experience a shared response to fiction. This may be approached in various ways. For example:

- children might have individual copies of the novel and share the text in class through a combination of oral and silent reading
- the teacher or different pupils could read the entire text aloud in instalments from a single copy.

A combination of these two approaches can also be adopted but it is important that, if individual copies are used, they are kept in the school so that all the children discover simultaneously how the story unfolds. Children read at different rates, however, and less fluent readers might perhaps be given the opportunity to prepare a particular passage in advance of reading it aloud in class. The reading should be surrounded by discussion but not interrupted too frequently as this would inhibit the flow of the story and frustrate the readers who are anxious to discover what happens next.

## Further ways to share a response to text

Pupils' responses to a shared text such as the class novel may be developed in a variety of ways:

- A reading log might be used as a means of keeping track of characters or events by jotting down thoughts or 'snap reactions' as a book is being read.
- Children might like to 'adopt' a particular character and build up a character profile under headings such as appearance, personality and habits.
- They can be encouraged to write an epilogue.
- They can be encouraged to compose 'meanwhile' episodes.
- They can be encouraged to write reviews.
- They can be encouraged to write or tell further adventures of a particular character.
- Making 'spider plans' and webs can be useful in predicting the possible directions a plot might take, particularly in a case where a central character is faced with a dilemma; for example in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Marita Conlon-McKenna, Eily's options when her little sister Peggy falls ill with famine fever, could be explored in diagrammatic form.
- A technique such as 'readers' theatre' is a valuable way of developing reading aloud with expression. An extract involving a number of characters and a lot of dialogue can be approached like an actor's script in which children take the parts of the various characters. This would be akin to a dramatic reading of a set script.
- Improvisation, mime and movement allow children greater freedom in the interpretation of characters and events.
- Imaginative activities involving visual arts can stimulate children to record their responses to books they read in challenging and exciting ways.
- Poetry as a form of response should not be overlooked. Children may like to experiment with different verse forms to try to capture the essence of a character or a particular event in a story.
- A text can be adapted to another medium—a musical, a drama.
- Class presentations of thematic programmes of poetry can be compiled.

Children should have the opportunity, occasionally, to select their own forms of response to what they read. The emphasis is not so much on developing new abilities in relation to text but on applying their abilities to an increasing variety of more complex texts and in developing and refining the responses which they make.

### Discussing the response to text

Children who talk about their reading and see themselves as readers can go on to develop reading as a lifelong habit and interest. Favourite authors and books the children have read independently should be discussed in class. This requires a knowledge of and a familiarity with children's books on the part of the teacher, who should be seen by children to be one of the community of readers, sharing his/her responses with them.

The modelling of response by the teacher involves a willingness to think out loud in relation to the text and to share these thoughts and opinions with the children. However, this should not be done with the intention of moulding their opinions or interpretations in any way. It is important, also, to remember that book discussion need not necessarily take place in a whole-class setting. Children also need opportunities to exchange and share responses in small groups and in pairs.



Children's responses to text can extend to other curriculum areas, for example visual arts.

# Approaches to poetry

*Children's engagement with poetry should be governed by the 'pleasure principle'*

Poetry should examine every area of children's experience and engage their imaginations as well.

## Poetry will encompass

- seasons
- festivals
- home and family relationships
- nature
- magic and mystery
- story
- history and mythology
- humour

## The role of poetry

Poetry should have a special place in children's language experience. The heightened and often compressed expression of thought and feeling and the music, rhythm and rhyme in the language can often provide unique and striking glimpses into aspects of human experience. Children's sense of beauty and their enjoyment of language can be fostered through poetry, and their aesthetic response awakened. It is important, then, that they experience and enjoy a rich and varied repertoire of poetry appropriate to their age and stage of development throughout their years in the primary school.

Children's engagement with poetry should be governed by the 'pleasure principle'. Hearing and reading poetry should be an intrinsic element of their language experience and one that is a source of joy and fulfilment. The key to this lies in the variety of poetry they encounter and the ways they are encouraged to respond to it.

## The repertoire of poetry

In the early years the emphasis will be on rhymes, riddles, nursery rhymes and jingles. This introduction to poetry is important and should convey the notion that poetry, more than any other form of language, has to do with a very special use of words, their meanings and connotations. The strong rhythmic and rhyming character of this sort of verse makes it very attractive to young children and makes it eminently suitable

for class and group recitation. Very often there is an element of repetition and this appeals to them as well.

As they grow older they should become familiar with a wider range of poetry—humorous, narrative (including traditional ballads, modern ballads and folk-songs) and lyric. The content of poems they encounter should not only touch on every area of children's experience but engage their imaginations as well.

The poems chosen should range widely in terms of cultural and historical origin but in senior classes, at any rate, there should be a particular emphasis on 20th-century Irish writing appropriate to their age. Many suitable poems can be found in the work of Irish writers and these should be supplemented with others from the main body of literature in English. They should also experience the work of some of the large number of contemporary writers who write mainly for children. Much of this is light-hearted in tone and gives an opportunity to introduce children to the fun that is to be had from poetry.

The classroom library should contain a wide selection of poetry collections and anthologies. These, coupled with the teacher's knowledge of what is available from the vast field of what might be appropriate to the children's stage of development, will form the basis for choosing poems. Children should, of course, be encouraged to read poems themselves and suggest poems to be

*A child's experience of a poem may be much more than he/she can express about it.*

read and discussed by the class but the teacher will be the principal influence in the choice of poetry for whole-class or group use.

### Choosing poems

The choice of poems can be influenced by many factors:

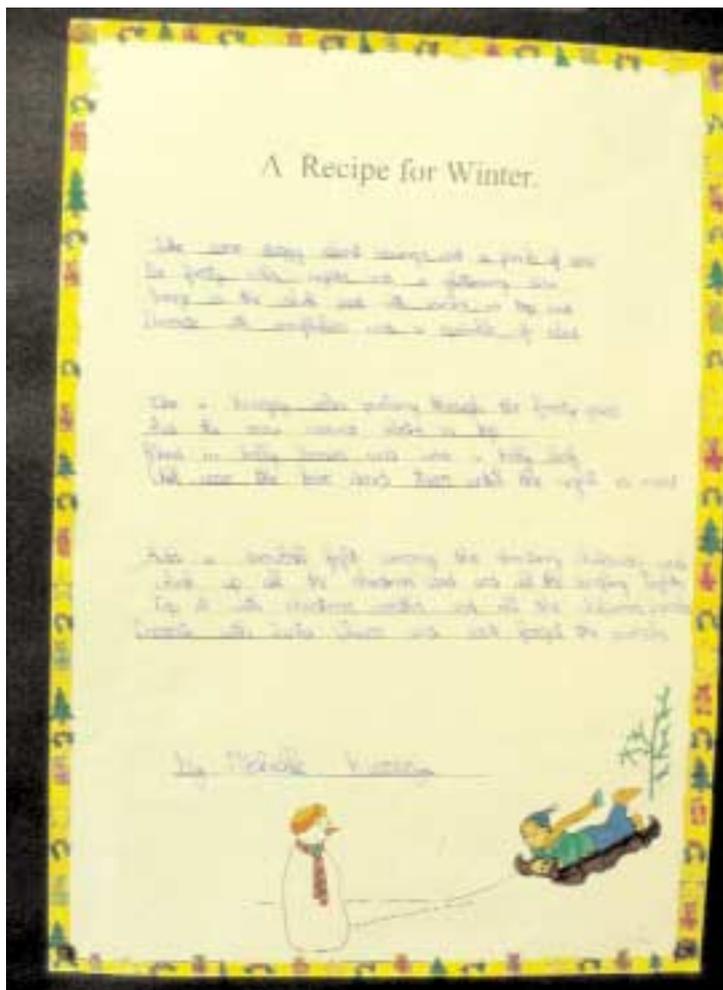
- time of year
- weather
- children's preoccupations and interests

- other areas of the curriculum
- a concern for broadening and deepening children's tastes
- events in the world at large.

However, the selection of poetry should be governed by one overriding concern. The repertoire of poetry the children experience should be of the highest quality. Although poetry can be a difficult medium it would be a mistake to underestimate the potential of children's response to it by choosing a selection that is less than challenging. It is important to remember that the child's experience of a poem, or of any work of art indeed, may be much more than he/she can express about it. In a very important sense, part of the experience is not expressible at all since each poem is a unique statement that cannot be paraphrased.

The poems that are chosen and the variety of ways in which children are encouraged to respond to them should help develop their sense of taste and discrimination and foster a conviction that poetry is a great source of pleasure.

Poetry also lends itself to integration with many areas of the curriculum, for example with visual arts (as already mentioned), history, geography, mathematics, PE. It is important to remember, however, that even if a poem does arise from activity in some other area of the curriculum it should be treated as a poem and not as a mere appendage to or illustration of another piece of learning.



Children should have frequent opportunities to write their own poetry.

## Developing children's responses

### Approaching a poem

Children can approach a poem in a number of ways:

- They can read it silently.
- They can listen to another pupil reading it.
- The teacher can read it aloud.
- They can listen to a professional reading of it on a recording.
- They can listen to the teacher reading it aloud while they look at the text.

This last can be very effective as they receive the poem through two of the senses at once. It is important, however, that the teacher's reading does justice to the poem because a good reading can often elucidate many of the difficulties of poetic expression. The suggestions outlined for telling a story have a similar relevance here.

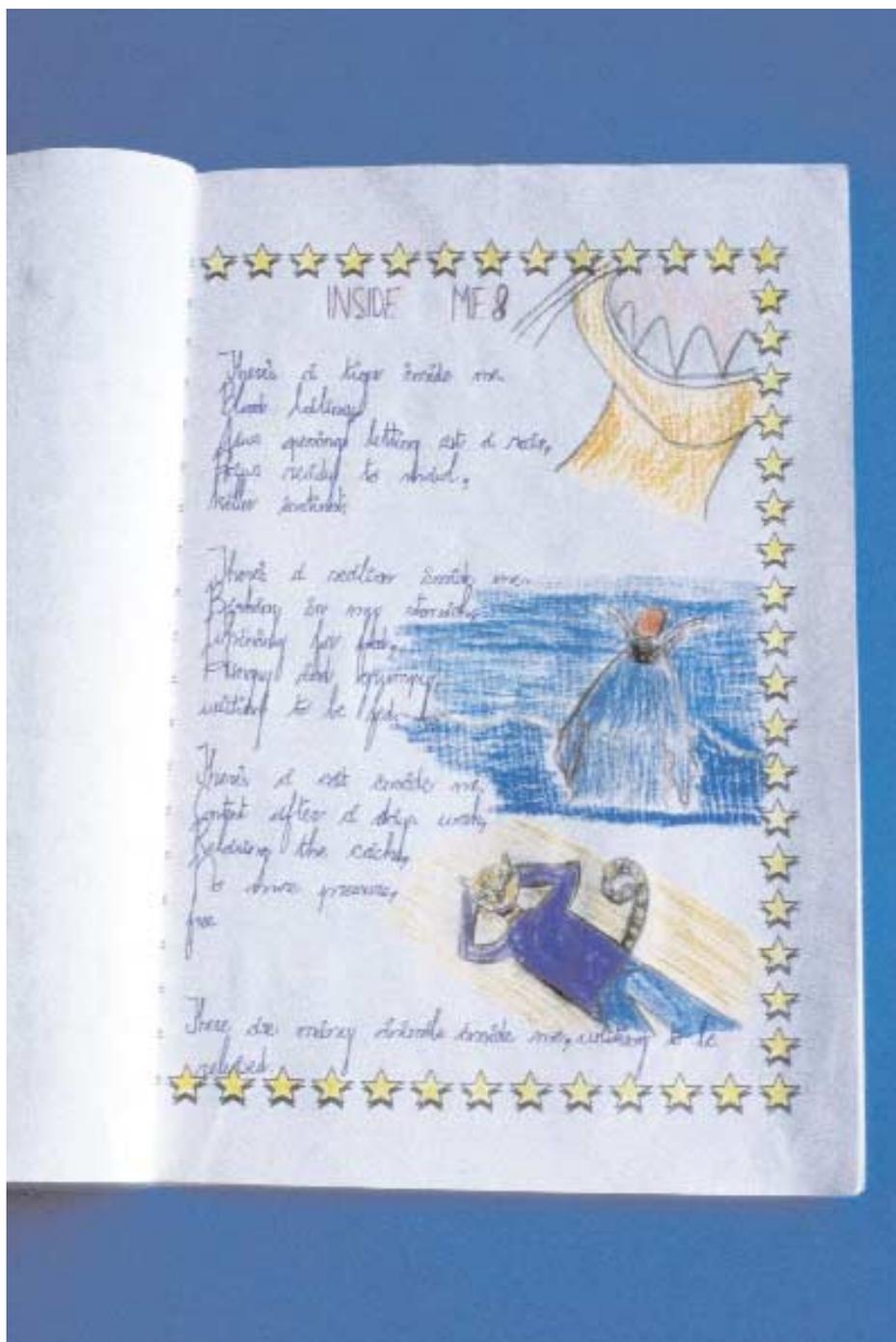
### Pupils' response

How children should be encouraged to respond to a poem depends very much on the poem itself, the reason it was chosen and the circumstances in which it is read. Sometimes it is better to read a poem to the children without any comment or discussion. Indeed it is a good practice to present a poem in this way frequently. This may lead to spontaneous discussion and if this happens so much the better.

One of the most effective ways in which children can respond to a poem is through discussion. The teacher has an important role in initiating this activity and in encouraging, guiding and prompting children to

- look for the thrust of the poem
- distinguish the deeper meaning under the surface meaning (for example in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*)
- appreciate how words are used to achieve particular effects
- appreciate the effects of rhythm and rhyme
- examine the function of repetition
- recognise the effects of simile and metaphor
- examine the effects of alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, imagery.

It is useful, sometimes, to compare two or more poems on a similar subject; for example '*Mid-term Break*' by Seamus Heaney and '*The Night before Patricia's Funeral*' by Michael Hartnett, where children can experience two poets' wholly different approaches to similar subjects.



A child's own poem, from his personal anthology

Other important modes of response would include:

- making anthologies of favourite poems: they can be made by the class, a group or individual pupils
- art work: many poems, particularly in the imagery they contain, lend themselves to pictorial representation
- dance: this is particularly appropriate in junior classes
- memorisation: children should be encouraged to memorise short poems that they like and stanzas from longer poems
- recitation: this can be done individually and through choral verse-speaking.

### Writing poetry

It is important, too, that the child gets the opportunity to write poetry and verse. It is one of the genres that should form part of his/her writing experience. Although the child ought to be aware, particularly by the senior classes, of the functions of rhyme and rhythm in poetry, he/she should be encouraged to perceive accuracy and sincerity of expression as the most important requirements in a poem. An over-preoccupation with rhyme can lead to mere doggerel at the expense of any real self-expression.

# Exemplar 6

## An approach to *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost

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### *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

*Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house is in the village, though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.*

It is sometimes a good idea to allow children to experience a poem in a context where comment and discussion are kept to a minimum and where the poem itself is allowed to speak. This is particularly true of a poem where the subject matter expresses a sense of magic or mystery, both of which can be diminished by an attempt to 'explain' them through a process of close textual analysis. Similarly, too much attention to the technicalities of the poem can often detract from the potency and suggestiveness of its language.

Robert Frost's well-known poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* provides an example of the sort of poem where a simple presentation in class can encourage children to focus on the fascination of the questions left unanswered by the poet. The teacher's role is not to persuade the children to speculate about what might be happening; instead, they should be encouraged to marvel at how the poet's use of language, atmosphere and selected detail combine to convey the haunting and tantalising anecdote on which the poem is based.

If, of course, the children themselves raise questions about specific details that intrigue them, the teacher will want to

respond to them, but in a manner which conveys the notion that poets often deliberately leave things unsaid and that many different interpretations of their words are therefore possible.

In order for the spell of the poem to be allowed to work in class, the teacher could usefully start by reading it aloud while the children follow the reading in their own copies of the text. The reading needs to be well prepared and to take account of the poem's mood, atmosphere, rhythm and rhyme.

Indeed, there is every reason for the poem to be read at least twice by the teacher in this way. Individual pupils can then be asked to read either the poem as a whole or selected stanzas. If these readings reveal different interpretations of mood and atmosphere from the teacher's, the teacher may wish to explore the reasons for this. The children might also be asked to nominate their favourite lines and to give reasons for their preferences.

These quotations could later be copied into their poetry notebooks and, perhaps in a subsequent art lesson, serve as the opportunity to provide appropriate illustrations for the poem.

## Presenting two related poems to children

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*The Lake Isle of Innisfree* by W. B. Yeats

and

*He Refuses to Read His Public's Favourite Poem* by U. A. Fanthorpe

Do you know what an exile is? Do you know anyone who is an exile? Do you know any popular songs about exiles? Sometimes the feeling expressed in them is a wish to return home, isn't it? Can you sing any of these songs? What things remind you of home?

Here is the poem written in exile. It's a poem written by the famous Irish poet William Butler (WB) Yeats who lived from 1866 to 1939. It was written in 1890, in London, where he spent some time as a young man. He found his inspiration for the poem in a jet of water which was playing in a shop window. The stark contrast between the cool, peaceful jet of water and the hot, busy London streets reminded him of the peaceful countryside round his home near Lough Gill in County Sligo. Here is the poem

### The Lake Isle of Innisfree

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.*

*And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the vales of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all aglitter, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of linnet's wings.*

*I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavement grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.*

Did you like the poem? Why? Did any of you not like the poem? Why? Basically it tells the story of a rather romantic young man's desire to leave the city to return to the peace that once was home—to the Isle of Innisfree which is in Lough Gill.

Does the name Innisfree suggest anything? Maybe you get a sense of its being free, do you? It might suggest that in English. But Innisfree is a corruption of the Irish name *Inis Fraoigh* which means Heather Island. Doesn't that suggest something rather different?

Let's look at some things in the poem. I'm going to read it again, so listen carefully. It sounds well, doesn't it?—like a good song. This kind of poem is called a lyric which is a kind of song; originally lyrics were poems accompanied by a lyre. Look at the rhymes: 'Innisfree' in the first line rhymes with 'honey-bee' in the third; 'made' in the second line rhymes with 'glade' in the fourth. This is a rhyme scheme called a b a b: free (a) made (b) bee (a) glade (b). Does this rhyme scheme continue throughout the poem? Yes, it does.

Listen to the rhythm—can you hear it? Imagine you're a drummer—tap the beat with your finger on the table in front of you. Can you count the strong beats in each line? Are they all the same? No! but it's interesting, isn't it? (In some poems and songs, the rhythm is regular—do you know any poems or songs like that?)

Look at the phrase 'bee-loud glade'. Isn't that a very fine way of saying that there are bees in the glade, and the glade is loud with the sound of their buzzing? Good poets can say things in a few memorable words where others would meander all over the place. Look

at the l's in the line 'And live alone in a bee-loud glade'. Some people think that all these l's create a calm, peaceful feeling. Do you? Say them slowly, fully, gently. They do, don't they? Can you find other lines with l sounds? Yes! The poem is full of them, isn't it? It creates a very musical effect. Now listen for 's' sounds. Don't they also add to the music?

What age are you now? What sort of things do you like to do? Could you always do these things? There are things you can do now that you couldn't do some years ago, aren't there? Are there things you did then

that embarrass you now? (There are, aren't there?) Well, apparently 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' embarrassed Yeats as he got older. Also, we are told, many of the people who liked his early poems like 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' weren't happy about later poems and plays about Maud Gonne, Byzantium, Crazy Jane and Cuchulain. The English poet U. A. (Ursula) Fanthorpe has written a poem about this. She calls it 'He Refuses to Read His Public's Favourite Poem'. The Senator is, of course, Yeats, who was a member of the Irish Senate. Here is the poem:

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### He Refuses to Read His Public's Favourite Poem

'I think Yeats hated all his early poems, and "Innisfree" most of all. One evening I begged him to read it. A look of tortured irritation came into his face and continued there until the reading was over.' —Dorothy Wellesley

*They always asked for it. He knew they would.  
They knew it off by heart: a b, a b,  
Reliable rhymes, thoughts they could understand.  
But dreams, as well. Their own, their Innisfree.*

*So why refuse? He knew the rest were better,  
His serious bid for immortality.  
What man defends the tenets of his twenties?  
Who would be tied for life to Innisfree?*

*"Give us Arise and go in your Irish accent,  
Give us the cabin, the glade, the beans, the bees.  
Not Maud, Byzantium, Crazy Jane, Cuchulain.  
We are your public. Give us more Innisfrees."*

*"A poem heard twelve times in public is dead and finished."  
"Ah no! Too much of a good thing there cannot be.  
Too much of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, Shelley,  
There is. But not enough of Innisfree.*

*I will arise and go now—Senator, please!"  
"I won't. I can't. I'm not him anymore.  
Young fool who prattles of crickets and wattles and linnets -  
I hate him in the deep heart's core."*

He Refuses to Read His Public's Favourite Poem is published in U. A. Fanthorpe's *Safe as Houses* (Peterloo Poets, Calstock, Cornwall, 1995).

# Approaches to writing

*Children learn to write through the process of writing.*

## The process of writing

Children learn to write through the process of writing. The skill of formalising thoughts on paper needs to be learned. A child cannot normally be expected to produce a finished piece of writing in a single attempt. That first attempt will usually be incomplete and he/she should be given the chance to improve it and to add to it. The child may feel it necessary to make one or more other drafts to get the piece to a 'presentable' state.

This, in summary, is the basis of the approach to writing contained in the English curriculum. This approach concentrates on the detail of the writing process itself in order to develop the child's expressive and communicative abilities. It incorporates a number of significant principles:

- The process of writing is as important as the product because, it is through consistent practice in using that process that children learn to write.
  - Children will write for different audiences, on a wide range of topics, and in a variety of genres.
  - Children will have a significant amount of control over the subject of their writing and the audience for which it is written.
  - Children will have a consistent experience of drafting, editing and redrafting a piece of writing.
- The teacher will act as mentor and guide in this process of drafting, editing and redrafting, helping children to develop expressive abilities and accuracy.
  - Through this interactive process children will gradually develop the ability to self-correct their writing and so become independent writers.

## The guidance of the teacher

The teacher's guidance is, of course, essential in helping the child to

- choose topics
- choose the genre in which to write
- improve the quality of expression
- elaborate on what he/she says
- add new ideas
- use the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling
- achieve an acceptable level of overall presentation.

## Valuing children's writing

Because writing is not a natural form of self-expression for children they need considerable encouragement in order to enhance their confidence in using it as a means of communication. This can be best accomplished through having their writing praised, receiving constructive criticism and seeing their efforts valued.

There will be a considerable disparity in the levels of writing competence that different children achieve. The teacher's approach to individual children's

writing should always be positive. In assisting them with their writing and in helping them to improve it the teacher should always begin by highlighting the merits of what is there as a basis for suggesting improvements. This gives the children confidence and at the same time stimulates them to want to improve a piece of writing.

Children's writing can be valued in a number of ways, including

- having it read aloud
- seeing it displayed
- having it included in the library corner or classroom library
- taking it home and reading it to parents.

One of the most effective ways of stimulating children to write and of helping them to improve their writing is to ensure that they feel that it is very much their own. This can be achieved if they are allowed a significant amount of discretion in the choice of topics for their writing, the purposes for which

they write, the audience for which it is intended and the form of expression they give it.

## Early writing

In infant classes the definition of children's writing will be broad enough to include any graphic representation the child attempts—lines, scribbles, drawings, etc.—and the distinction between this and art activity will be very blurred.

Gradually, however, the child's ability to use letters and words will evolve. This can be stimulated and developed through

- the experience of a rich print environment in a classroom that is characterised by the use of words and phrases as labels or signs that are changed regularly
- the teacher acting as scribe and modelling writing for the children (see Exemplar 4, p. 55, *Using experience charts as a basis for children's early contact with reading*).
- the experience of early reading
- copying letters and words from the blackboard and the environment
- learning to write his/her name.

However, even when children have begun to write words they will still often use them merely as a comment or a caption on a picture, since it will be some time before their command of the writing medium is adequate to express all that they have to say on a particular topic.



Early writing

*Early writing includes any graphic representation the children make to express themselves.*

The teacher should not be concerned if a child seems reluctant to be weaned from pictures. Pictorial expression may still be a necessary form of expression for some children even after the junior classes.

The formation of letters will form part of the child's writing development. The teaching of letter formations will be done as one of a number of activities that a child must practice in order to begin writing. The bulk of the time, however, ought to be devoted to expression and communication.

The approach to writing contained in the curriculum, highlighting the child's freedom of choice in dealing with a variety of topics, audiences and genres, presupposes flexibility in the materials and formats in which writing is recorded. Although copybooks will have a function, the use of separate sheets that can be stored in individual folders is more amenable to the methodology and aims of the writing programme.



A six year old's interpretation of a familiar story

## Fostering the process of writing

### Selecting topics for writing

The range of topics the child writes about should be broad and he/she should have a significant degree of autonomy in choosing them. This can mean that, although all the children in the class may be using the same genre (a letter, a story, a poem etc.), each child will choose the particular topic for his/her piece.

The topics on which children write should arise from the reality of their lives or imagined experiences and should reflect their concerns and interests.

Children should be encouraged to list topics that they would like to write about. They may draw on experiences both in and out of school and on areas such as hobbies, friends, parties, trips, television programmes and children's literature. Sources of topics for children's writing might include

- personal concerns
- everyday experiences
- life at home and in school
- stories
- social needs, e.g. a letter, a note
- personal reading
- topics arising from other areas of the curriculum
- poetry
- drama.

The prescription of topics that do not relate directly to children's experience should be avoided. In senior classes children will sometimes be expected to write on prescribed topics without redrafting but the success with which they do this will depend on their development as independent writers. This is a measure of writing competence rather than a strategy for learning to write.

Occasionally, some children will have difficulty in choosing a topic or in advancing a piece of writing that they have already started. The following strategies may be helpful in these situations:

- **Brainstorming:** a group of children offer ideas or suggestions. At first every idea is written down without comment. When every child has had a turn different children may elaborate on their own ideas, offer comments, or ask questions about other children's ideas.



Writing alone may not express everything the child has to say.

- **Webbing:** children may test out ideas by using a “web” or “map” to jot down their thoughts about a particular topic and make connections in relation to ideas on the map. This may help them to clarify their thinking or, perhaps, to discard an idea, realising it was not what they wanted.
- **Research:** children can often obtain information through research and investigation. This may involve interviewing people or using reference material. Such research lends authenticity to their writing.

### The importance of oral work

Although the stimuli for children's writing will have many sources, assignments in writing should generally be preceded by extensive oral language activity on the topic or topics in question. This may take place in whole-class, group, teacher-pupil or pupil-pupil contexts. The particular topic, the occasion from which it arose and the genre being used can all have a bearing on the particular organisational approach chosen.

Oral discussion can explore

- various facets of a topic
- why the topic is chosen
- the language that might be used— words, phrases, expressions peculiar to the topic
- the type of format required by the genre in which the piece is to be written.

*The child should write for real purposes and real audiences.*

*The child should come to recognise that different registers of language are needed for different purposes and different audiences.*

## Audience and purpose

As well as choosing topics that are ‘real’ to them children should be encouraged to write for a real audience and a real purpose. This will help to define the form and style of the writing and provide it with a *raison d’être*.

Very often the audience and the purpose of a piece of writing will be dictated by the topic or the genre in which it is written, for example a diary entry or a letter, but even where this is not the case children should always be encouraged to approach any piece of writing with a particular reader or audience in mind. Likewise, in the preparation of a piece of writing it is important that the teacher establish a sense of purpose for the writing: for example, he/she might say ‘we’re going to write about how cold it is today so that we can read it and remind ourselves about it when the summer comes’.

It is important that the range of the audience for children’s writing expands as they mature. At first they will write mainly for themselves, for the teacher and for their parents, but later the audience for their writing will include other adults, other children, relations, pen pals, institutions, firms, etc.

## Registers of language

In becoming independent writers children will, among other things, learn to use language in ways that are appropriate to different audiences and to different genres. In junior classes children’s writing may be no more than written speech but, gradually, they need to become aware of the differences between oral and written language. This is not to say that children’s written language should be formal or stilted in any way; rather they should come to recognise that different registers of language are needed for different purposes and audiences. For example the register of language required for a greeting on a birthday card would be quite distinct from what would be used in a letter to a firm seeking information for a project, and different again from the language appropriate in an adventure story. The range of their reading experience will have a great bearing on this. Through the approach to reading the teacher can help to make children aware of the appropriateness of different registers of language.

## Writing genres

The genres in which children write will also vary. As with the audience, the range of this will expand as children grow older.

This is important in a number of ways:

- Different purposes and audiences require different genres—a story, a recipe, a telephone message, a poem, a letter.
- Children's writing should reflect the real purposes of written expression.
- If writing ability is to be developed properly children need to have the experience of using language in different ways.

The more obvious genres they should experience are

- stories
- descriptions
- explanations
- argument
- letters
- notes
- diaries
- recipes
- writing in other curriculum areas
- records of learning
- reactions to reading
- complete books.

An important aspect of the teacher's role is planning the appropriate

contexts that will encourage children to select and explore their own experiences through using a variety of genres.

## Drafting, editing, redrafting

Drafting, editing and redrafting lies at the heart of the approach to writing contained in the curriculum. It can

- reinforce children's ownership of their writing
- help to develop their expressive and communicative abilities
- help children improve their writing skills through self-correction
- give them responsibility for their own writing efforts
- provide the means through which they can come to control the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling
- lead them to become independent writers.

## Writing the first draft

When writing the first draft children should be encouraged to write as much as possible and not to discard any ideas. They should be reassured, at this point, that the most important thing is to get their ideas down on paper. Presentation, spelling and handwriting will be attended to later. In this way children realise that what they have to say is valued and that the primary function of writing is to communicate.

*Drafting, editing and redrafting is at the heart of the writing process.*

## Revising

### *Discussion between the teacher and child*

After a child has made a first draft a process of discussion or 'conferencing' between teacher and child can follow.

This can

- give the child the opportunity to ask questions and seek advice
- give him/her the opportunity to talk over ideas with the teacher
- give the teacher the opportunity to prompt the child to a more detailed, expressive use of language, for example:  
 Could you write that sentence in another way?  
 Can you tell me more about the bird?  
 I wonder how Sam felt when he got lost in the shop?  
 Perhaps you could write more about that.

A child may also read his/her writing to a friend or become part of a small group that provides feedback to each other. It is important to structure the work of the groups so that children get positive comment as well as suggestions for improving their writing. Children could for example, be asked to find one thing that they liked about someone's writing and to make one suggestion for improving the writing. At this stage children should keep their writing in a folder and add to it on a daily basis. The folder

would become a portfolio of their written work.

Armed with the suggestions from the conference with the teacher and the feedback from other pupils the writer can then return to the first draft and proceed to polish it by

- adding to it
- deleting from it
- reordering it
- rewording parts of it.

The amount of revision will depend on the age and sophistication of the writer.

The revision of the writing should produce a fuller, better-expressed and more accurate version. A further conferencing session can then take place. It is at this point that the child should be led towards a consideration of the level of presentation the writing might require. This would involve questions of grammar, punctuation, spelling, handwriting and general neatness. A final draft of the writing could then be prepared.

Children will learn about these conventions in the context of their own writing and come to realise that if the conventions are not attended to the clarity of the passage can be affected. The teacher can take note of particular conventions that need attention and schedule mini-lessons with the whole class, or with particular children who demonstrated a need or a readiness for a particular skill.



*If criticism is offered it should always be constructive.*

### Encouraging self-correction

It is important that, throughout the process, the child will be led to self-correct his/her work as far as is possible. He/she can attain more and more facility in this respect through a consistent experience of conferencing with the teacher and redrafting writing. There should also be variety in the ways in which the writing is discussed. Although conferencing between pupil and teacher will have a consistently central role to play, opportunities should be given to groups and pairs of children to discuss each other's work and to offer advice.

It is essential, however, that if criticism is offered it should be constructive. The way the teacher models the conferencing process can do much to lead children to a helpful and affirmative attitude towards each other's work.

### 'Publishing'

The final version of a piece of writing should be in the child's best hand-writing or it may be typed. It may be put in a book of the child's own writing or form part of a class book of writing to which each child contributes. At this stage children may wish to illustrate their writing. This can be done using a variety of media or using painting and drawing software on a computer. Presenting the final, polished, perhaps illustrated version of children's writing may be called 'publishing'.

It is important that children see their writing displayed on the classroom wall or in a public area outside the classroom. It may also be added to the classroom library. Children may share their writing with each other through reading it aloud or through silent reading. They may share it with other classes also. The sharing of writing enhances children's feelings of success and accomplishment and will inspire and motivate them to further writing.

### Grammar and punctuation

The curriculum is specific about the knowledge and the command children should have of grammar. It is not intended that this should be taught formally or that it should be approached out of context. However, it is important that, by the end of the senior classes, children are able to recognise and name the principal parts of speech and their more common properties, and to be aware of their functions.

The ability to use the parts of speech accurately and to observe the conventions of grammar can be developed in the context of children's general language development. In particular, the process of writing, editing and redrafting gives the teacher ample opportunities to guide pupils towards an appreciation of the functions of the parts of speech and a control of the conventions of grammar and punctuation.

*Control of the conventions of spelling can be achieved progressively through a multi-dimensional approach.*

*Onset and rime can help develop an awareness of spelling patterns.*

## Spelling

### *A multi-dimensional approach*

Control of the conventions of spelling can be achieved progressively through a multi-dimensional approach. This should be planned at school level and be used consistently in each class.

It would include

- accepting approximate spelling
- linking spelling with the development of phonological and phonemic awareness (see p. 58)
- linking it with 'onset and rime' (see p. 58)
- building up a bank of commonly used words
- having a rich experience of environmental print
- compiling personal dictionaries
- using dictionaries and thesauruses
- using strategies such as predict, look, say, cover, write, check (see p. 86)
- becoming familiar with common spelling rules.

### *Developmental stages in mastering spelling*

When children attempt to master the complexities of English spelling they go through a number of overlapping developmental stages:

- using sound-letter relationships
- using pattern
- using meaning.

Many children move through this developmental process without difficulty and arrive at correct spelling through trial and error. The use of approximate spelling allows children to self-correct their attempts as they move through the different stages but direct instruction can be of benefit to those who fail to spell accurately, particularly children who find it difficult to develop literacy.

Direct instruction in spelling should be undertaken in the context of reading and writing and should be guided by information derived from the children's approximate spelling.

### **Using sound**

Children who are beginning to show some sound-letter knowledge in their reading can be taught to reproduce correctly the features of words that have a one-to-one correspondence to sounds.

Word study involving picture sorting, word sorting and word hunting is particularly effective.

### *Picture sorting*

In picture sorting activity the children categorise words according to rhyming word families, starting with short vowel sounds:

van	dog
man	log
can	frog

*Word sorting*

At the word sorting stage children sort written words according to short vowel rimes:

-ug    -ack  
 plug   track  
 slug    back  
 mug    black

*Word hunting*

Word hunting requires children to list words from their reading according to short vowel rimes.

**Using patterns**

At the second stage when children are beginning to use vowel patterns such as 'ee' or 'ai' the same activities can be used with words containing long vowel rimes and rimes with silent letters:

-ean    -ore  
 clean   more  
 mean   store

**Using meaning**

At the 'meaning' stage of the developmental process children are beginning to use their knowledge of particular characteristics in the spelling of nouns, verbs and adjectives, for example, in their spelling of polysyllabic words. Word study at this stage focuses on roots and prefixes and on examining words according to parts of speech:

-or	-ate	-al
author	educate	topical
conductor	decorate	dental
sculptor	separate	musical

*Teaching spelling strategies*

Progress in spelling takes place when children experience a consistent and systematic approach to its teaching. They need to master strategies for learning new words which ensure that they don't rely totally on spelling out words letter by letter. Their attention needs to be directed to the whole word with the intention of reproducing it.

**Predict – say - look - cover - write - check .**

One useful strategy for learning spelling is to follow the process

Predict - say - look - cover - write - check .

Children's attempts at spelling should be mainly in written form. When they are engaged in a piece of writing, for example, they will be attempting to spell words. They should predict what the spelling might be and then say the word as they write their attempt. The teacher's input in this strategy will come at the conferencing stage. In discussing the writing the teacher will correct or normalise a misspelling.

When rewriting, the child will follow the process of

- looking at the correct spelling of a misspelt word
- covering it or turning it face down
- writing it
- checking to see if the last attempt is right.

These last four steps, look, cover, write and check, are also used when the child is learning spellings. He/she will look at a word, cover it and visualise it, write it and check if the attempt is correct.

By the time children reach the senior classes they should have begun to master the common spelling rules. English is noted for the irregularity of its spelling in relation to its pronunciation, and this is one of the reasons some children find it so difficult to gain a control of conventional spelling. There are, however, some spelling rules that can be learned, for example:

- delete 'e' at the end of a word before adding 'ing'
- most plurals are formed by adding 's'
- 'q' is always followed by 'u'.

During the writing process the teacher should constantly refer to these and other spelling rules and the child's attention can be drawn to any exceptions that may arise.

# Exemplar 7

## Mini lessons in writing

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It is through attempting to write that a child learns to write. If he/she is to improve as a writer these attempts should give the experience of using language in different ways and of experimenting with different aspects of language. It is through a process of trial and error, with the teacher as guide and facilitator, that the child will learn the skills of writing.

Mini-lessons can provide the means by which children can, as they write, learn to use language in the most expressive and effective way. These can take place in whole-class, group or one-to-one settings

### Making scribbles and letters on children's pictures

The purpose of this lesson is to encourage groups of emergent writers to refine their marks on paper into conventional writing. The teacher talks to a group of about four to six children about their 'writing'. This may take the form of pictures which represent their communications.

The teacher then encourages each child to tell what his/her picture is about and selects one picture which is, for example, about a birthday party. The picture might depict the party with friends, the cake, candles, decorations etc. The teacher then writes the following words slowly, sounding out each letter as he/she writes it:

'It was Hannah's birthday yesterday.'

As the teacher is writing, children in the group are encouraged to give the appropriate letters based on the phonemes into which each word is broken. The teacher will write the appropriate sentences for each child as they work on this particular piece or on a new piece.

Through this kind of lesson children are encouraged

- to use print in their writing
- to witness the teacher slowing down the saying of words in order to spell
- to see left-to-right orientation being put into practice
- to become familiar with the shapes of letters that are in their own names
- to give more detail in their pictures in order to make their message clearer to readers.



Very early writing may take the form of pictures.



### The use of quotation marks

The purpose of this lesson is to explain the use of quotation marks and the conventions that circumscribe their use. This activity might be used from second class onwards.

The teacher can talk to the class about using the actual words people say in their writing. Through discussion he/she can lead them to see that using them can make the story livelier and get the message across more vividly.

The children can then look at books from the class library and look for places where the actual words of a character are used. A discussion can take place that will make children aware of one of the conventions that indicate direct speech in print.

The more obvious features should emerge fairly readily. When direct

speech is used, marks are put at the beginning and at the end of the words the character uses. They can be told that these are called 66s and 99s and that they are given these names because the shapes look like these numbers. 66s come just before a person speaks and 99s just after.

As children mature they can gradually be introduced to the terms 'speech marks', 'inverted commas' and 'quotation marks'. They can also be encouraged to notice that each time a new person speaks the writer goes to a new line.

The teacher can then either pick out examples of the use of quotation marks in different books and ask the children to look at them or, alternatively, ask them to pick out examples for themselves.

They could then be asked to redraft the piece of writing they are working on and to remember to use the 66s and 99s.

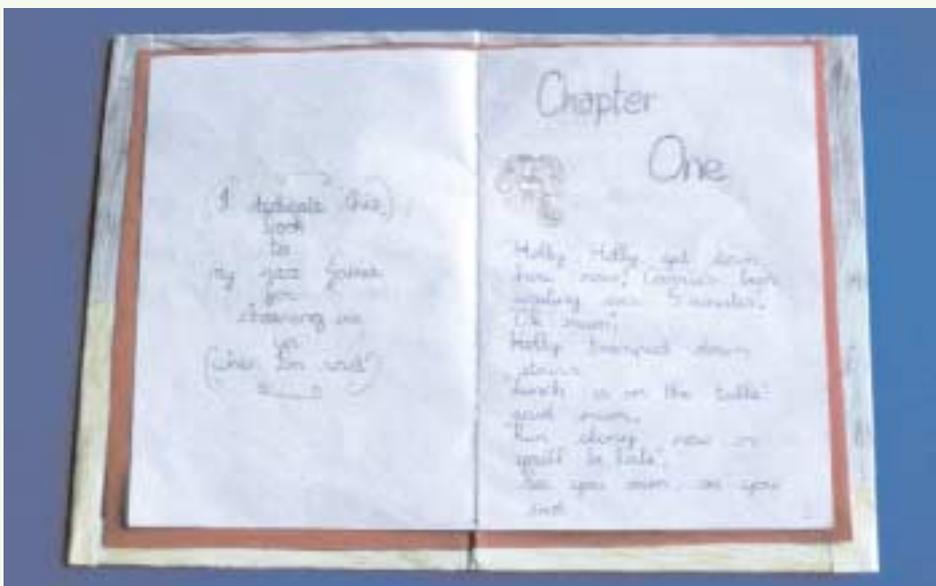


### The use of adjectives and verbs

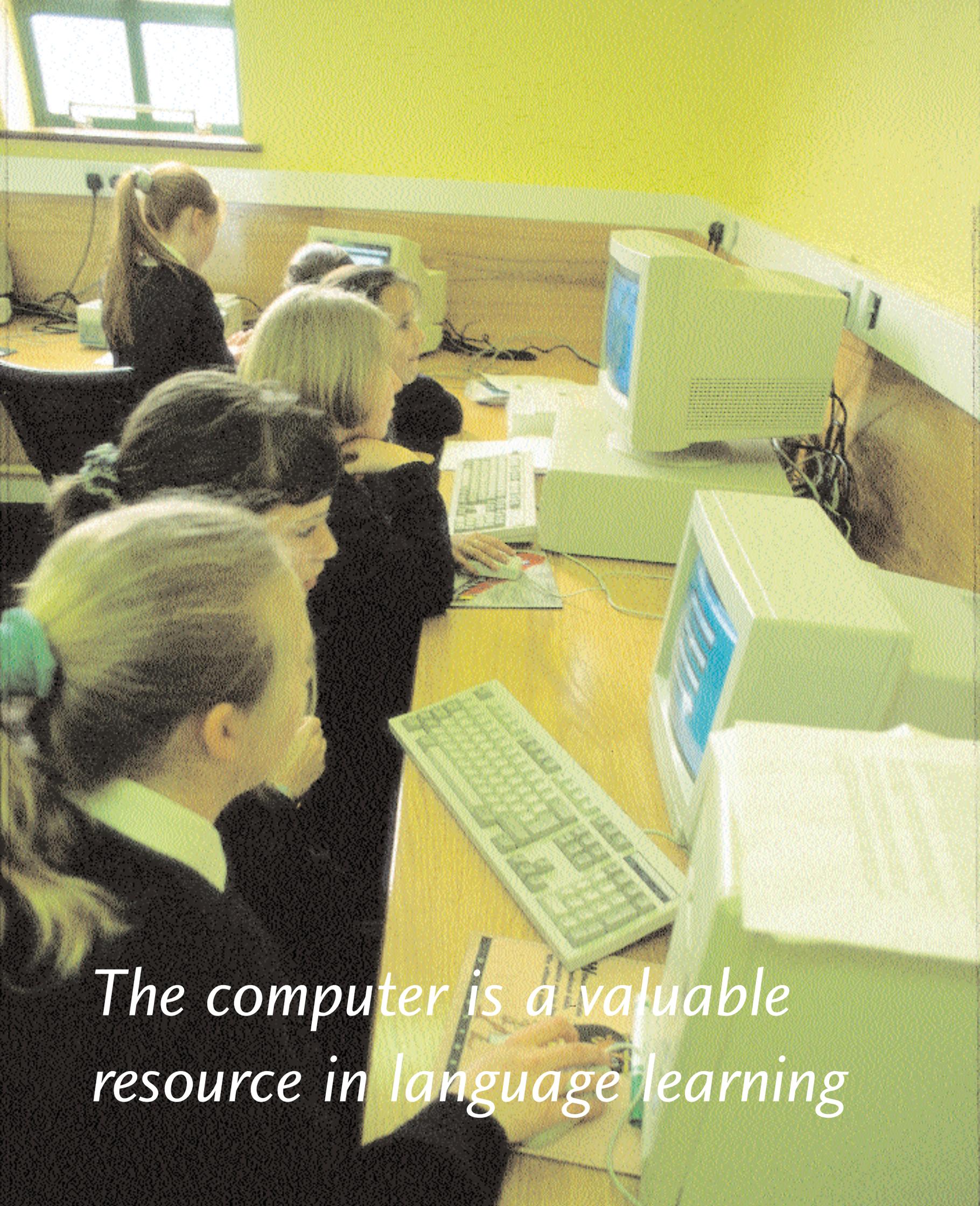
How adjectives and verbs are used when writing a description or a narrative is important. Children in fifth and sixth classes, for example, could be encouraged to enhance the expressive effect of their writing by using a broader range of verbs.

A child writing about walking through mud might, with or without prompting, use words like 'sticky', 'soaking', 'smelly', 'cement-like'. In a conferencing session on this particular piece of writing the teacher might suggest that the child should look at the experience in another way. He/she might say, 'Instead of describing what the mud was like, think about how it felt like to make your way through it.' This might guide the child to think about it from another point of view and elicit descriptions such as, 'I sank up to my ankles in the mud.' or 'It sucked as I tried to walk.' In this way the child can be made aware that the use of appropriate verbs can be just as descriptive, or even more so, than a litany of adjectives. Engaging a child in such a discussion can give him/her a better appreciation of how words can be used effectively.

After an exercise like this children could be encouraged to read their writing aloud and a discussion might take place on how different children used words in their writing. As part of such a discussion the teacher could help them to appreciate the functions of the adjective and the verb and how both can contribute in making writing more expressive.



Children should have the opportunity to engage with an extended piece of writing.



*The computer is a valuable resource in language learning*

# Information and communication technologies

Computers and other items of information and communication technologies enrich the teaching and learning of language considerably. The following are among some of the ways in which they may be used:

- Computers are a major contributor to a print-rich environment. Using programs inevitably involves the reading of on-screen instructions (for example, in pull-down menus) and following direction, all of which demand a level of literacy. Children's use of computers will therefore foster their awareness of print and encourage the development of reading skills.
- Computer programs are available to support the development of word identification, spelling and other reading skills. Many of these programs use a 'games' approach to encourage and reward the learner. These packages usually have a number of levels of difficulty which may be chosen by the teacher or the learner and some incorporate a recording of the pupils' achievements which may assist the teacher with assessment.
- Many children's books are now available in multimedia and cd-rom formats. These 'books' may be read by the child from the screen or the child may listen as the story is 'told' and illustrated by the computer. The best of these packages allow the child to control the pace of the reading. Words and sentences are shown and highlighted as they are read by the narrator and the child may select items of interest in the pictures about which further information is then made available.
- Increasingly, reference books are available in CD-ROM form rather than in conventional paper-based dictionaries and encyclopedias. Entries on CD-ROMs may include information in text, in pictures and in sound and video images. These visual and sound elements add greatly to the attractiveness of this type of reference work and can enhance children's understanding of the textual information. Alphabetical order, classification and other skills are just as necessary in using these newer forms of reference works and the increasing use of information technology will require the continuous development of these skills in children.
- Word-processing programs are ideally suited to the process writing approach advocated in the curriculum. By creating documents in computer files children may draft, edit and redraft with ease while mechanical copying and rewriting may be avoided. At times a child's lack of keyboard skills may prove an obstacle: in such cases the teacher might consider entering the rough draft of the text into the computer for the child who can then edit it and produce a further draft.



- Computers can also enhance the standard of presentation of a child's work, giving him/her an added pride in the final product. This is particularly important for children who may have motor control difficulties.
- Concept keyboards are available for use with younger children who would find the conventional keyboard inaccessible. A concept keyboard consists of a touch-sensitive pad which is subdivided into a number of areas. Each area can be linked to a word (or series of words), a picture, a colour or other concept. While each key on a conventional keyboard is linked to a single letter or other character, the areas of a concept keyboard will reproduce a whole word or phrase on screen. This enables the child to build up a sentence or phrase with ease. Concept keyboards allow the teacher to predetermine the words or phrases attached to each area of the keyboard so they may be used to reinforce vocabulary work and reading skills.
- Connection to e-mail and the internet will give children access to another form of communication, enhance their language awareness and give them an added incentive to develop language skills. Through the internet children may gain access to a wide range of literature, textual information and visual images. Exchanging letters, messages, poetry, stories and details of projects with other schools and children are excellent ways in which information technology may encourage writing and reading abilities.



Word processing can greatly assist the process of drafting, editing and revising.

# Looking closely at children's work

## Using the assessment tools

The teacher will assess children's language development on both a short-term and a long-term basis. By using an appropriate range of assessment tools he/she can monitor individual children's progress and so plan the contexts, strategies and content that will contribute most effectively to their learning.

### *Teacher observation*

This form of assessment will be used more often and more consistently than any other. It is an integral part of the teaching process. In using it the teacher continually monitors the minutiae of children's reactions, successes, failures, difficulties and progress in relation to their language experience in school and adjusts his/her teaching strategies accordingly. From time to time it can be useful to make brief notes about individual children or groups of children in order to facilitate longer-term planning.

### *Teacher-designed tasks and tests*

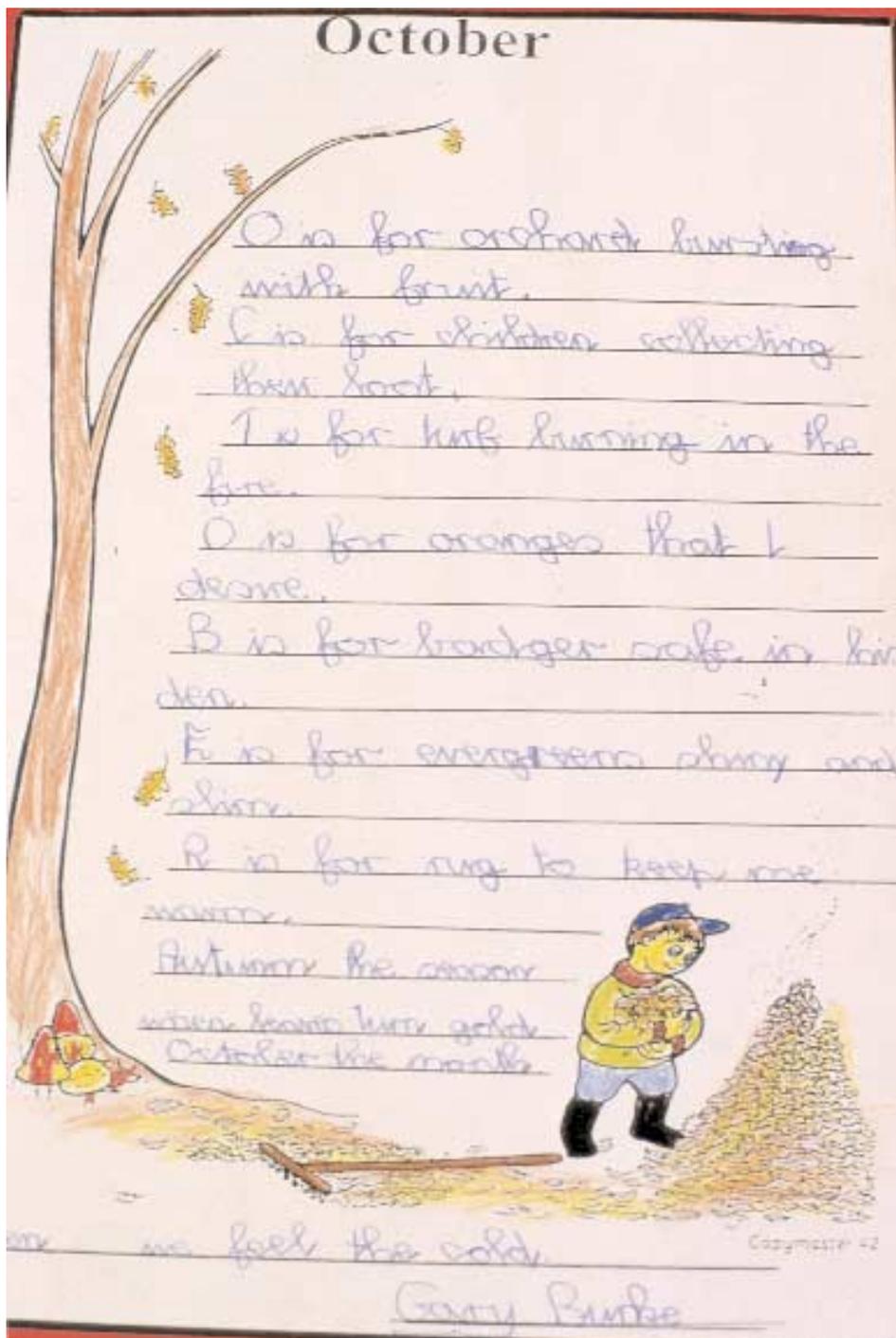
These will form part of many teaching contexts and strategies. The success or otherwise with which a child performs a writing task, engages in a reading assignment or makes an oral presentation to the class can provide valuable information about a child's progress and his/her particular learning needs.

### *Work samples, portfolios and projects*

These are very useful in helping to assess a child's progress in English. They can give a longer-term summative picture of his/her ability, level of work, application and interest. This can also highlight some of the more persistent difficulties he/she may be experiencing.

### *Curriculum profiles*

These can give a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced, structured dimension to teacher observation. Curriculum profiles in English have been constructed and standardised for Irish children. It is possible also for a school to construct indicators of its own that could go some way towards measuring children's progress in language learning and in learning through language. Their value could be enhanced by moderating them through comparison with similar models in other schools and through extensive teacher discussion.



### Diagnostic tests

When a child exhibits difficulty in particular facets of language learning it is important that diagnostic testing be used to identify the detailed learning needs involved. This is useful in quantifying and confirming teachers' evaluation of reading and comprehension ability. In the area of reading, care should be exercised in the use of many of the commercially-produced diagnostic tests. These focus on discrete language skills and may indicate areas in which the child is having difficulties—reproducing the sounds of digraphs, for example. However, language learning difficulties such as these will not be eradicated by trying to teach the skills in isolation.

The most effective way of approaching such needs is in the context of the child's actual reading experience. The careful observation and recording of the miscues a child makes when reading a suitable text can tell the teacher much of what he/she needs to know about the particular reading difficulties a child is having.

### *Standardised tests*

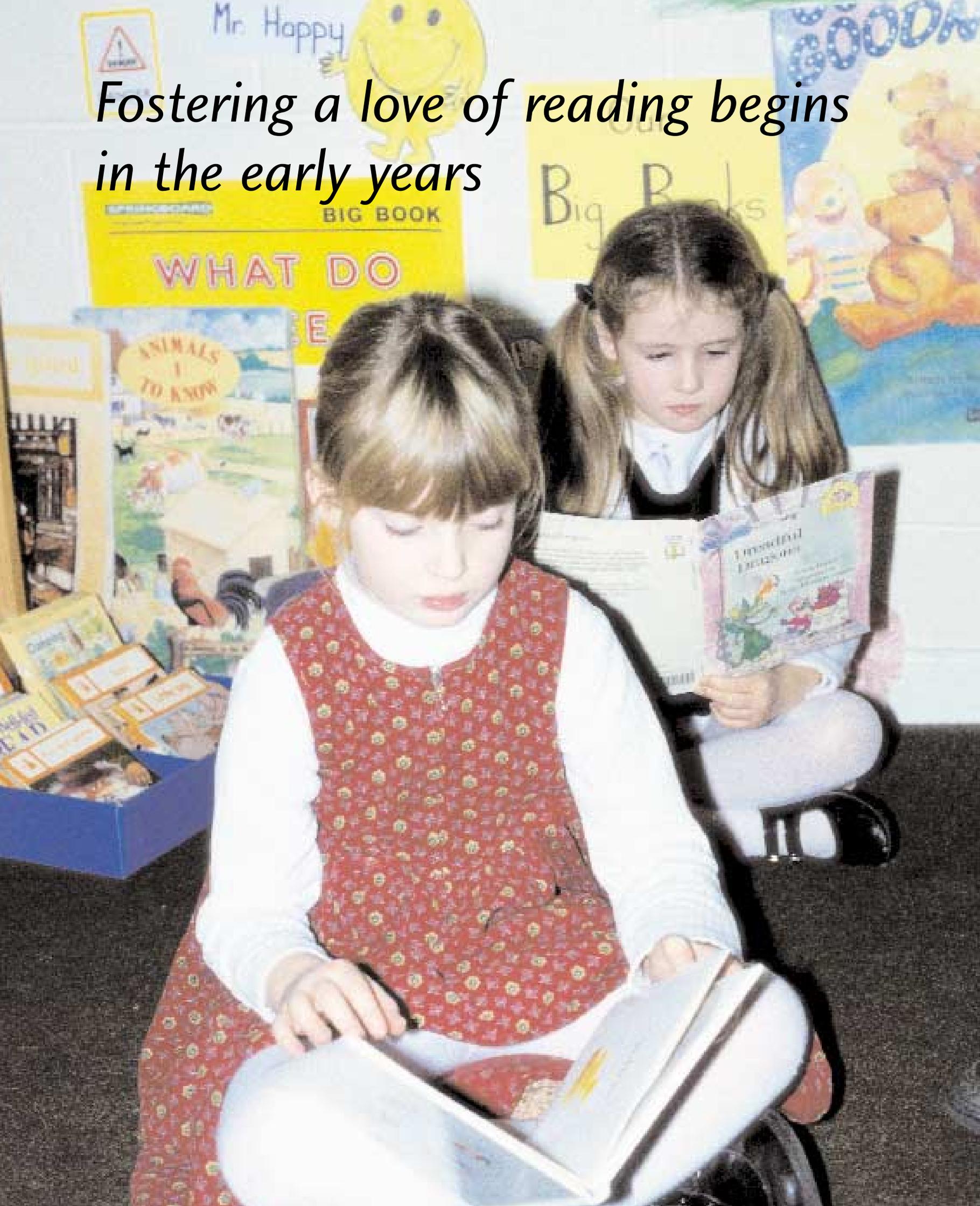
These are widely used. Tests are available that are standardised for the Irish context and that can provide a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced observation of pupils. They can quantify the extent to which a child is performing in relation to particular language skills and confirm less precise judgements the teacher makes using the more informal assessment tools.

They are also valuable in helping to establish the extent to which particular children need remedial support.

### *Manageable and practical assessment*

A consideration of the issue of manageability is central to the question of assessment. The issues just mentioned along with the frequency of testing and a concern that children be accustomed to and at ease with assessment procedures should inform the planning of assessment in the school.

*Fostering a love of reading begins in the early years*



Section 6

# Appendix

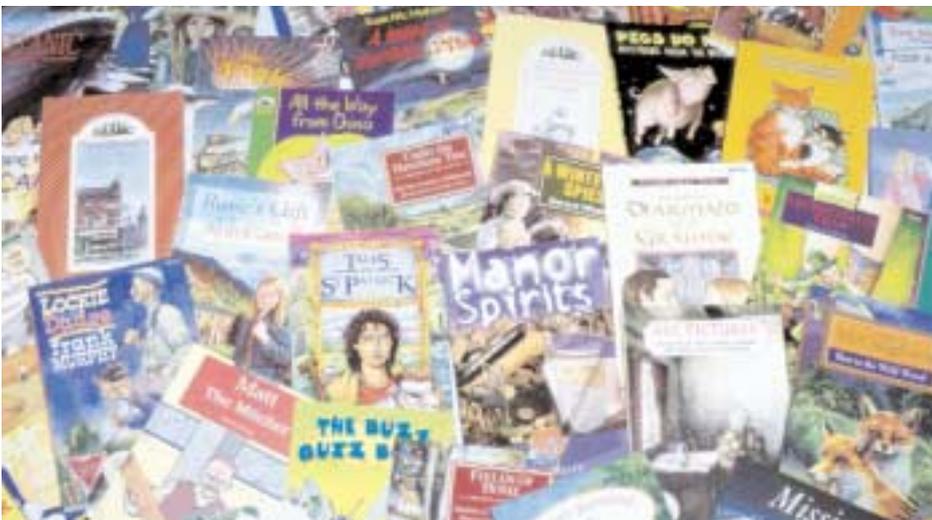
# Information sources for children's reading and library materials

Children's Books Ireland  
19 Parnell Square  
Dublin 1  
Telephone 8725854

Children's Books Ireland (CBI) is a national children's literature association created in 1996 through the merger of the Children's Literature Association of Ireland and The Irish Children's Book Trust. CBI runs children's literature events for adults throughout the year. The main events are a Spring Seminar, Summer School and Autumn Conference. CBI also runs events for children during the annual Children's Book Festival and publishes *Children's Books in Ireland* magazine twice a year. CBI also runs the Bisto Book of the Year Awards. Members are entitled to reduced rates for attendance at conferences and seminars. They also receive all issues of *Children's Books in Ireland*, *Best Books* (the Children's Book Festival reading guide), and news and information about children's literature in Ireland.

School Library Association Republic of Ireland  
The School Library Association  
St Andrew's College  
Boosterstown  
Co. Dublin

School Library Association Republic of Ireland (SLARI) is part of the International School Library Association. It provides information, training support and a network for those involved with school libraries at primary and post-primary levels. It organises conferences, seminars and library visits in Dublin and in other parts of Ireland. Its publications include the quarterly, *The School Librarian*, and a series of guidelines on all aspects of the school library such as literacy and the school library, promotion, management, the Internet, and basic routines in the school library. Members are entitled to four issues of *The School Librarian* per annum and reduced charges for events and other publications.



The child should experience the best literature appropriate to his/her age and experience.

Reading Association of Ireland  
Blackrock Education Centre  
Blackrock  
Co. Dublin  
Telephone 01-2300977

The Reading Association of Ireland is a subsidiary of the International Reading Association. It aims to stimulate and promote interest in literacy, to help in the professional development of teachers in the areas of language and literacy, to disseminate knowledge helpful in the solution of literacy problems, to research new trends in the development of literacy, and to promote interest in children's literature. It publishes *Reading News* three or four times a year, and organises an annual reading conference, a spring term seminar and summer courses for teachers. The Reading Association of Ireland gives a bi-annual award for outstanding books for children that are published in Ireland. It has also published a number of books and pamphlets. Members are entitled to copies of the newsletter, access to its published material and reduced admission to events it organises.

Poetry Ireland/Éigse Ireland  
Bermingham Tower  
Dublin Castle 2  
Telephone 01-6714632

Poetry Ireland runs the Writers in Schools Scheme, a partnership with primary schools through which writers visit the classroom.

The County Library Service  
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna  
53, Upper Mount Street  
Dublin 2  
Telephone 01-6761167

The County Library Service provides block loans of children's books to schools. It can also provide assistance to schools in purchasing children's books and may be able to facilitate the purchase of books through wholesale suppliers.

Education Centres  
(See listings in telephone directory.)

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# Glossary

This limited glossary contains commonly understood working definitions of some terms used in the English curriculum and teacher guidelines.

digraph	a combination of two letters or characters used to represent a single sound
engagement with text	reading, comprehending, reflecting on and responding to a piece of text
expository text	text that describes or explains
grammar	a systematic description of the generally accepted rules of a language
grapho-phonetic cues	the information provided in sounds and in combinations of sounds represented by letters and groups of letters that helps to predict words
language-experience material	the creation of text by the teacher in collaboration with the pupils in order to facilitate early reading
large-format books	books that are produced in a format large enough for collaborative reading with groups
literacy	the level of reading and writing ability sufficient for everyday life but not necessarily for completely autonomous activity
morpheme	a speech element having a meaning or grammatical function that cannot be subdivided into further such elements
narrative text	an account of events, experiences etc.
onset and rime	onset is the part of a syllable that precedes the vowel and rime is the remainder of the syllable

phoneme	one of the set of speech sounds in a language that serve to distinguish one word from another. The smallest units of sound in a word
phonemic awareness	the knowledge that words are composed of individual speech sounds
phonological awareness	a range of skills such as the ability to analyse words into their constituent speech sounds, the ability to combine speech sounds, and the ability to detect rhyme and alliteration
representational text	text in the form of diagrams, pictures, graphs etc.
scanning	reading quickly in order to establish the organisation and principal features of a text
semantic cues	the contextual information in a text that will help to predict a word or words
skimming	reading quickly in order to find out the gist of a text
syntax	the totality of facts about the grammatical arrangement of words in a language
syntactic cues	the information contained in grammar and language use that facilitates the interpretation of text
text	the entirety of a linguistic communication in written or printed form or through sign, gesture or situation
writing genres	the various forms appropriate to different types of written communication—story, essay, letter, dialogue, recipe etc.

# Membership of the Curriculum Committee for English

These guidelines have been prepared under the direction of the Curriculum Committee for English established by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

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<b>Co-opted advisors</b>	Áine Cregan Finian O'Shea	Mary Immaculate College of Education—Limerick Church of Ireland College of Education—Rathmines Dublin
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