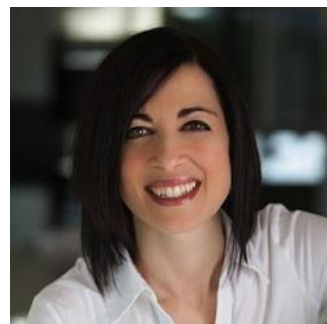




TalkforWriting™

Grammar into Writing using Traction Man

Maria Richards walks you through how to plan lessons that teach grammar in context, using Mini Grey's story Traction Man with a Year 2 group.



Selecting your focus

The lesson objective was to improve the description of characters, so it was important to decide which grammar features to focus on. A great way to do this is to check the [Talk for Writing progression document](#), which makes all the grammar objectives clear, year by year.

I chose to focus the grammar teaching on expanded noun phrases and also to introduce the concept of a precise verb, in order to describe a character more effectively.

Warming up the focus

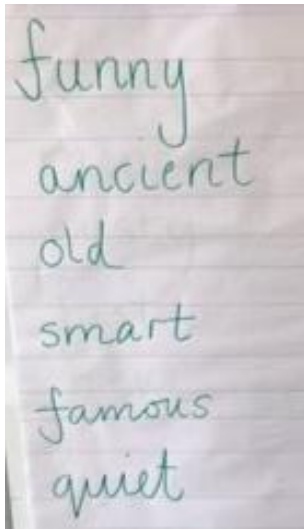
It's good to start the work with warm-up activities that help the children internalise the patterns of the language they will be focusing on. To get us going, I showed the children the sentence below:



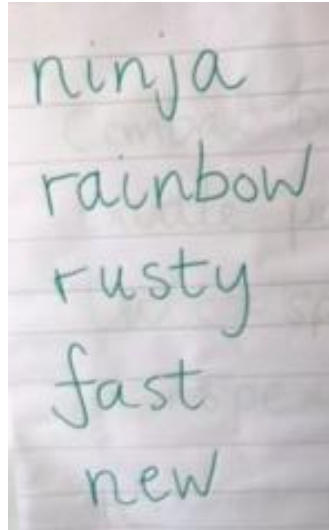
The man got into the car.

We read it together and decided that it was correctly written. However, as a reader, it didn't give very much detail. I asked the children to identify the nouns in the sentence and explained that if I knew a bit more about them, then that would make for a much better description. Once they had identified *man* and *car*, I asked the children to generate as many adjectives for each one as possible as illustrated below.

**Adjectives to go
with man**



**Adjectives to
go with car**



We then looked at this more closely. I explained that when we add adjectives to a noun phrase like *the man*, we get an expanded noun phrase, for example: *the old man*. We looked at a few more examples, practised saying them and wrote some on whiteboards.

We then focused on improving the verb to make it more precise and descriptive. Instead of *The man got into the car*, what else could we have instead of *got*? The children talked to their partners for ideas, then we did quick-fire feedback. They gave me as many ideas as they could in one minute round the group. For example:

The man: *jumped, fell, raced, squeezed, lumbered, flew, ran, tiptoed, danced, crept ...* into the car.

By being more precise with the verbs, we are telling our reader more about the character and what they do, say or how they behave.

Introducing the stimulus

I then introduced the children to *Traction Man* by Mini Grey. The story shows us Traction Man's many missions, whom he defeats and what he wears when doing so! I explained that Mini uses great examples of expanded noun phrases all the way through the story and I pointed out the first few. Then as I read to the class, the children raised their hands every time they heard an expanded noun phrase. I also challenged the teacher, who was working with me, to collect as many expanded noun phrases as they could on the flipchart and this is what we got:

brave, little
scrubbing brush
sweaty bandana
brass helmet
metal shoes
Grant, interGalactic
People mover
All-in-one, knitted
green romper suit!

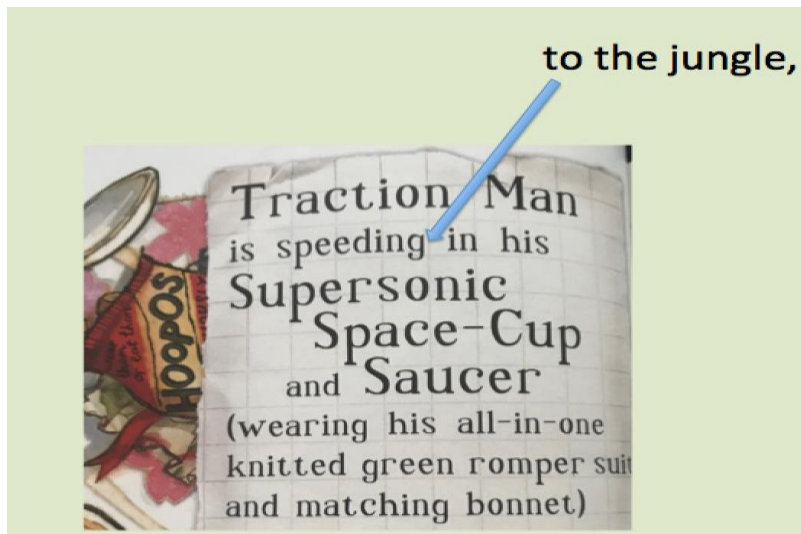
Combat boots
battle pants
latex space suit
perspex helmet
Rocket boots
sub-aqua suit
infra-Red Mask

I stopped reading at the part of the story where granny has given Traction Man a new outfit to go into the jungle. I asked the children to imagine what he might encounter if he were to go to the jungle in his new romper suit.



© Mini Grey

I showed the children how this might work in the story by adding to this page, which gave us the opportunity to create a new scene for the story.



© Mini Grey

After a brief discussion, I then introduced a new character for Traction Man to defeat.

Applying the grammar



The idea was to use the visual stimulus to write creative sentences about what the character looked like and did, using the expanded noun phrases and specific verbs. This way, we would be applying the grammar for the purpose of enhancing character description beyond the obvious e.g. *The tiger had black and orange stripes.*

In order to do this we looked at each noun phrase separately and generated the adjectives to expand it

Expand the noun phrase

The sharp teeth

orange
long
knife-like
dagger-like
arrow
needle
white
dirty
stained

The thin whiskers

white
wiry
fluffy
long
curved
rat
wild
hungry

We took each noun in turn and we crafted sentences together. I showed the children how to raid each list to find the best adjectives to expand the noun and kept dropping in the terminology, so that by the end of the writing, they had heard me refer to 'expanding the noun phrase', 'noun phrases' and 'precise/interesting verb,' a number of times.

A red nose

tomato
cherry
reindeer
round
small
broken
swollen
soft

The long stripes

broken
jagged
rough
pointy
criss-cross
colourful
orange
black

Throughout the writing I was discussing what worked well and why, with the children and supported them in making the choices to get the best descriptions possible. We chose adjectives to best match the type of character we wanted – fierce. Equally, we could have created a happy tiger, yawning and munching!

Here is an example of what we created:

The Tiger

The fierce tiger growls.

Its dagger teeth ready to tear.

The thin, wiry whiskers slice through the air like fireworks.

A blood-red nose spies for prey.

The deadly, jagged stripes criss-cross over its colourful body.

The hungry tiger waits.

The Tiger

The fierce tiger growls.

Its dagger teeth ready to tear.

The thin, wiry whiskers slice through the air like fireworks.

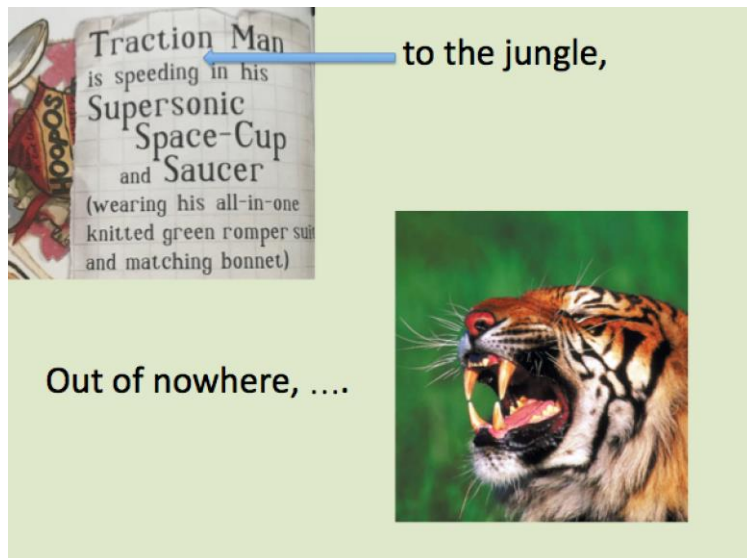
A blood-red nose spies for prey.

The deadly, jagged stripes criss-cross over its colourful body.

The hungry tiger waits.

To end the session, I wanted to show the children how they could then raid their descriptive sentences and drop them into this new part of the story. We went back to the page where Traction Man is in the jungle and added the line...

Out of nowhere ...



I then told the children the next part of the story, adding in the new character:

Out of nowhere, a **fierce tiger** appeared with **its dagger teeth ready to tear**. It **growled** at the strangers. Traction Man noticed **its thin, wiry whiskers slicing the air like fireworks**. It had a **blood-red nose** that **spied** into every corner, searching **for prey**. From his Supersonic Space-cup, he could see **its deadly, jagged stripes criss-crossing its colourful body**. The **hungry tiger** stalked the jungle and **waited** beneath the colossal tree where Traction Man had landed. What could he do?

If I had longer with the groups, I would have used shared writing to craft this bit with them, showing them how and where to place the sentences, to make them into a successful paragraph.

What next?

Over a series of lessons, the children can use this method to create their own descriptive sentences about the tiger, using the class brainstorm. They could then write a paragraph where they put the tiger into the scene.

Following this, they can choose another character that Traction Man might encounter on his missions and write about them, using the same process. They could write the sequel to Traction Man, where he goes on more missions and encounters or defeats new characters along the way – all underpinned by this process. The characters created would be the

stimulus for the new writing (this could be an innovation or even a stimulus for the independent application).

Other areas to focus on

Of course, this idea can also be used to describe other aspects of a story. We could have used it to craft what the jungle looked like and, therefore, focus on setting. For this, depending on where the children are and what they need to move forward, we could have explored any of the following grammar:

- Prepositions – to place things within a setting e.g. *Twisted vines crawled **over** branches.*
- Similes using like – to give the reader a more vivid picture of what’s there e.g. *Twisted vines crawled over branches, **like hungry vipers.***
- Relative clauses to add detail about the things within the setting e.g. *Twisted vines, **which were cracked and gnarled,** crawled over branches.*
- Expanded noun phrases, using two adjectives, to describe objects within the setting e.g. ***The ancient, twisted vines** hung from the trees.*
- The use of the continuous verb form to show how things behave in the setting or are placed in the setting e.g. *Twisted vines **were hanging** from ancient branches.*

Again, using a visual stimulus we could brainstorm the vocabulary needed, craft the descriptive sentences (underpinned by the grammar) and then drop them into a descriptive paragraph. The same idea would also work if we wanted to focus on the description of objects in a story.

This idea can be adapted for any grammar focus, age group and book and is just another tool to support the creative teaching of grammar, through reading and writing in context.

With thanks to teachers Hannah Morini and Year 2 at St Mary’s CE VC Primary School, Bridport, Dorset and to Ben Straker and class 2 at St Thomas Cantilupe C of E Academy, Hereford, for lending me their children and working alongside me.

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Maria Richards is available to deliver training throughout the UK & internationally. Please visit the training page on the Talk for Writing website for more details. Want a project to run in your area? Contact Maria for details. maria.richards@talk4writing.com

