



There are a number of specific reasons why teachers encourage their young learners to express ideas in stories, poems, letters and puppet plays. Above all, caring teachers want to stimulate their learners' creativity and improve their self-concept. It is important to make children aware that they really are capable of writing in English. Even if a

inexpensive. Judicious use of recycled cardboard boxes, fabric scraps, photographs, coloured pencils, pens and paper can turn them into imaginative classroom resources which can be added to each year. Moreover, an ongoing writing project is an ingenious way to keep active learners working constructively. Those children who finish worksheets quickly can be directed to the writing corner.

In addition, the vast majority of young learners will be encouraged to read more in English once they have created their own books. Since the

Creating class books

Robin de Andrés and her learners write together and make a library.

child's first attempt is nothing more complex than a simple picture with a one-word caption underneath, that child has successfully produced a piece of writing in English. Simple writing activities can gradually aid the self-confidence of young learners and improve their ability to write more complex ideas. Teachers can also use guided writing activities to reinforce vocabulary development and provide additional practice in basic grammatical structures.

A joint project

Working together to produce a class book ensures that all learners pay careful attention to minor details to make sure everything is correct and that the finished product looks attractive. The children are much more motivated to spell accurately and write grammatically correct sentences for a joint project that will be turned into a book than for normal written exercises completed in individual workbooks.

Teachers need to make the best use of limited resources. It is often difficult and prohibitively costly to provide a large number of suitable library books in English for young learners. However, making your own books is relatively

stories, poems, letters and plays in the books are based on their own efforts, they can fully understand and enjoy what they read.

Top tips for making books

- ★ **Break up the project into small sections.**
- ★ **Include writing activities as part of the daily routine.**
- ★ **Involve parents and colleagues in your book-making projects.**
- ★ **Utilise all available resources.**

Preparing the project

How can teachers successfully involve their learners in creating a book for the class library? There are a few specific considerations that teachers need to deal with in planning creative writing activities with young learners.

Pre-writing activities

The learners probably have a very limited vocabulary and lack an innate grasp of the proper grammatical structure of English. A way of



overcoming these difficulties is to provide a variety of interesting pre-writing activities. For example, we might ask the children to say the names of the parts of a house and to label them on a large poster before we ask them to write a description of their home. Or we may also engage in a lot of verbal interaction discussing a specific topic before they start writing about it. Talking increases learners' overall fluency in English and helps them to feel more at ease in writing.

Controlled writing activities

Rather than wasting time and increasing frustration by correcting a myriad of errors in a single paragraph, teachers may prefer to focus initially on controlled writing activities with young learners. These are activities in which the form and content are provided primarily by the teacher. For instance, copying a story, labelling pictures and designing crossword puzzles are all examples of controlled writing activities.

A monster project

Keeping in mind our learners' limited vocabulary and poor grasp of grammar, here is a plan for a series of five lessons to show how young learners can create a class book with guidance from the teacher. My own project took as its starting point a book about a lost baby monster, but this is just an example of something you could use.

Day 1

Read the story you have chosen to the class. (I used *Where's My Baby?* by Julie Ashworth and John Clark.) Encourage learners to repeat with you the key phrases that occur over and over in the story:

'Is this your baby, Mrs Monster?'
'No, my baby has ...'

Day 2

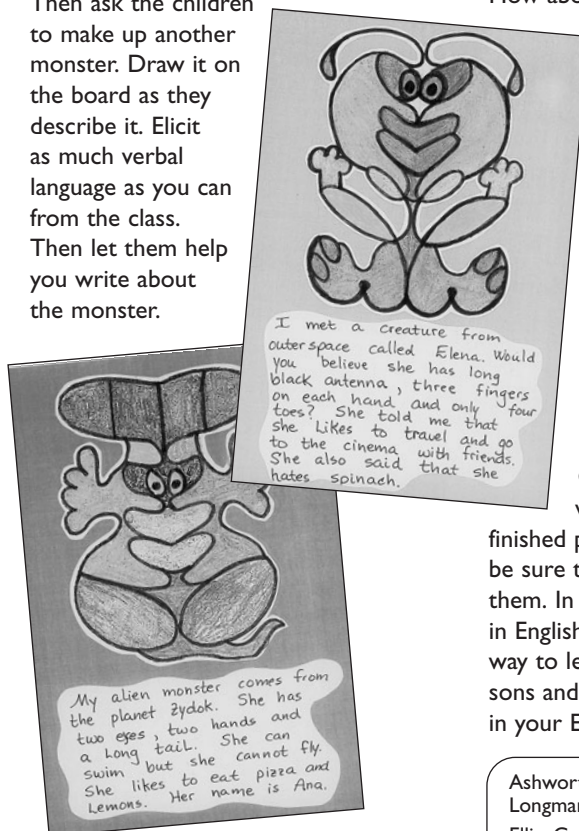
Make a large drawing of one of the monster babies. Let the children help you label the parts of his body – eyes, ears, nose, head, hair, tail, scales, fangs and so on. (Keep in mind that we are talking about baby monsters!)

Day 3

Distribute a handout with a small drawing of a baby monster. Help the children label the parts of the body. Then write, *'He has a (red) head and (four) eyes'* on the board. Let the learners invent other sentences describing the baby monster. Print them on the board for them to copy.

Day 4

As a group, read aloud the sentences written on the board the previous day. Then ask the children to make up another monster. Draw it on the board as they describe it. Elicit as much verbal language as you can from the class. Then let them help you write about the monster.



Day 5

Ask the children to make up their own monsters, drawing pictures and writing about them. Because of the stimulation of their imaginations, the vocabulary-building exercises, and the controlled writing activities, all the children should be able to write well-constructed paragraphs. Collect the work and bind the pages together into a class book. Andrew Wright suggests stapling the pages together and using thin card for a cover. Some of my colleagues cover the card with colourful fabric scraps to make a more durable book.

Further ideas

Don't hesitate to use alternative strategies to increase the children's involvement in writing stories in English. Why not have them dress up as characters in a fairy tale or a favourite play? Take photographs and then write a simplified version of the story. Perhaps some of your learners can design beautiful illustrations but spell atrociously. Let those children display their talents to their best advantage. How about letting a good speaker with

clear pronunciation record the story on tape? Once the book has been finished, encourage your best learners to devise activities to complement it. Would it not be possible for them to devise simple reading comprehension questions, grammar exercises based on the text, or a simple word-search puzzle?



Of course, the children will all want to take turns sharing the finished projects with their families, so be sure to send the books home with them. In addition to promoting reading in English, class books are a wonderful way to let parents know what their sons and daughters have been learning in your English classes. **EP**

Ashworth, J and Clark, J *Where's my baby?* Longman 1992

Ellis, G and Brewster, J *The Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers* Penguin Books 1991

Fairfax, B and Garcia, A *Read! Write! Publish!* Creative Teaching Press 1992

Wright, A *Storytelling with Children* OUP 1995



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