

No secret: using good models to write narrative in Year 2

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In this article, Rebecca Kennedy describes a teaching sequence taught by Tammy Round, a Year 2 teacher, at Tiverton Academy in Birmingham, which led to the children making informed and effective language choices in their narrative writing.

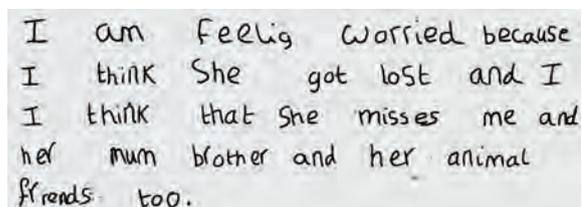
To bring together her year's teaching, Tammy Round planned a three week narrative unit with cross-curricular links to geography and art, based on *Lila and the Secret of Rain* by David Conway, illustrated by Jude Daly (2009). This beautiful picture book tells the story of an African village which is ravaged by drought and of one girl's mission to bring rain, and provides young writers with an excellent model for writing. Tammy plans and models her work according to the REDM process: reading and exploring; explicitly teaching grammatical points; discussing and experimenting with language; and finally making deliberate language choices in writing.

Reading and understanding the story: reading comprehension

The first week of the sequence was devoted to reading, understanding and exploring the story as well as working on explicit grammar teaching focusing on use of language to create effects. Much of this was revisiting previous teaching. Before reading the story, Tammy asked the children to look at the images on the cover and first two double page spreads and compose some noun phrases. To encourage attentive looking and more creative phrases she asked them: 'What do you notice? Where is it set? How do you know?' As the children fed back their observations, she noted and expanded their available vocabulary to talk about the story, making sure they had noticed the people, crops, children, cattle, village and background scenery. Tammy then read the story to up to the end of the second double page spread ('too hot to milk the cow'). She modelled re-writing the opening of the story with a new point of view showing the hardship the villagers were suffering. She worked with the children to create phrases like 'scorching sun', 'lifeless crops', 'skinny cows' and to expand these to phrases like 'village in the middle of nowhere', 'dusty, barren land'. As she and the class worked on making these vocabulary choices, she focused on the power of the words to create an atmosphere and paint a picture of the village. To support this work, she had prepared a display of photographs of life in rural Kenya.

In the following three sessions, Tammy wanted the children to focus on Lila and how she might be feeling. Together they read the next three double page spreads ('...the saddest thing she knew') and discussed how Lila might feel.

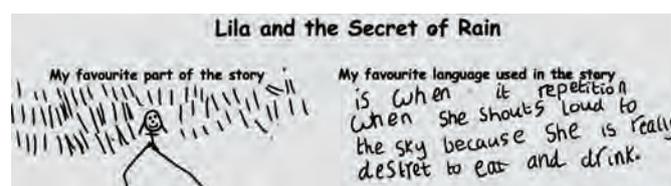
As a guided group task, the children wrote a first person narrative. Tammy made sure that in differentiating the work, all the children had access to the full story and were supported as they made their oral and written responses. The groups generated ideas which Tammy and Cordelia McKenzie, the teaching assistant, recorded as a resource for writing. The less fluent writers wrote a recount from Lila's point of view as she is setting out on her journey and the more fluent writers wrote a diary entry as Lila's grandfather on the morning she sets out (see Figure 1). In the fifth session, Tammy read and discussed the whole story, asking the children which part they liked best and their favourite language used in the story, noting their responses as aids to memory when they came to write (see Figure 2).



I am feeling worried because I think she got lost and I think that she misses me and her mum brother and her animal friends too.

I am feeling worried because I think she's got lost and I think that she misses me and her mum brother and her animal friends too.

Figure 1: Zarah's diary account as Lila's Grandad (with a transcription)



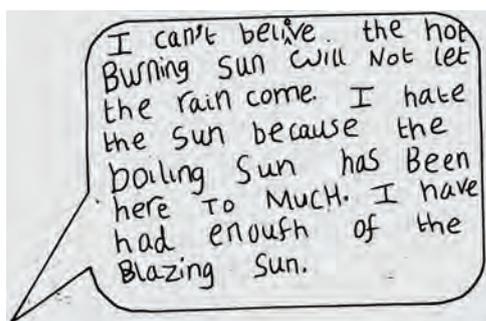
My favourite language used in the story is when it repetition when she shouts loud to the sky because she is really destret [desperate] to eat and drink.

Figure 2: Aymaan's favourite part of the story and favourite language (with a transcription)

Clearly, both writers have connected with the emotions of the story and can enter into the characters' feelings.

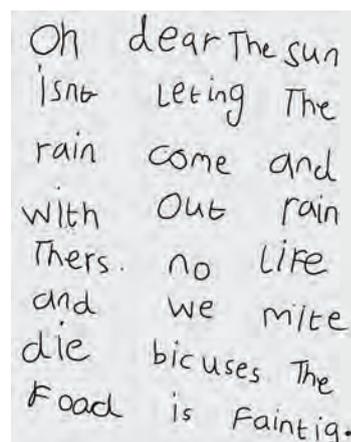
Reading and understanding and contextualised grammar teaching

The second week began with Tammy re-reading the story several times, talking about the story language and the patterns of language used for effect. She focused on past tense endings and teaching about spelling: adding 'ed' verb endings to regular verbs which she listed on the board as the children identified them. She then moved on to explicit spelling teaching of regular verb endings. In the following session the class revisited the text and Tammy demonstrated mapping the story, asking the children to re-tell the main events of the story in order. The children made their own story maps which would become their plans for narrative writing later in the week. In the next two sessions, the class explored the use of language in the text, particularly repetition for effect, for example, 'She wept and she wept. All of a sudden everything went quiet'. Tammy wanted the children to see how a gentle start could build up to the tumult of the thunderstorm. She showed the children a video of a thunderstorm and together they built vocabulary, referring back to the story as well as their own ideas based on watching the build-up of the storm and the lightning. They made chalk drawings of a lightning bolt and chose their favourite language which they jotted on their story plans. Tammy then demonstrated using chosen vocabulary to build a description, making this an opportunity to revisit choice of conjunctions and prepositions. As the class built descriptions together, she reinforced past tense constructions and standard English for narrative writing. During the final session of the week, Tammy's small group teaching focused on character voice, giving speech bubbles to the less fluent writers and those who were just becoming fluent, and introducing speech marks to the children who were quite or very fluent writers. She gave the groups images of Lila at different parts of the story and asked them to write from Lila's point of view.



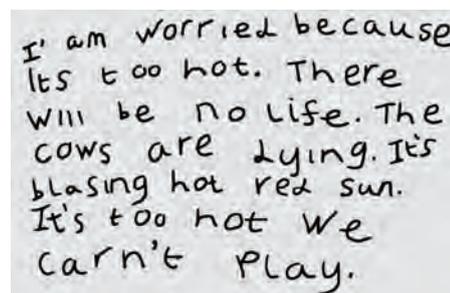
I can't believe the hot burning sun will not let the rain come. I hate the sun because the boiling sun has been here TO MUCH. I have had enough of the blazing sun.

Figure 3: Zubaydah's speech bubble about the drought from Lila's point of view (with a transcription)



Oh dear, the sun isn't letting the rain come and with out rain thers no life and we mite die bicuses the food is fainting.

Figure 4: Henna's speech bubble about the drought from Lila's point of view (with a transcription)



I am worried because it's too hot. There will be no life. The cows are dying. It's blazing hot red sun. It's too hot. We can't play.

Figure 5: Rifayah's speech bubble about the drought from Lila's point of view (with a transcription)

Zubaydah clearly knows that capitals show emphasis and uses noun phrases successfully. Henna has a good sense of the potential dangers of the drought and uses the progressive present tense successfully, as does Rifayah, who also shows a secure grasp of apostrophes for contractions.

Into writing: writing the narrative

The final week of the teaching sequence was devoted to extended writing. Tammy's planning focused on the following:

1. Story structure: story map/cartoon strip reinforcing beginning, problem and resolution.
2. Use of time adverbials to help separate the story into sections, for example, 'for weeks and weeks'; 'late one evening'; 'the following morning when the sun was still asleep'.
3. Use of vocabulary for effect: character and setting, using descriptive vocabulary, for example: 'The rain cascaded down the mountain'; 'the lightning ripped the sky in two'; 'Lila wept'.

4. Use of conjunctions to extend sentences into multi-clause sentences (correctly demarcated).
5. Consistent use of third person past tense.

After teacher modelling, the most fluent writers wrote the full story with paragraphs, drafting first using cartoon strips to signal: new place, new time, new paragraph. The reasonably fluent writers wrote the full narrative as an extended piece (see Figure 6) and the least fluent group used picture prompts of parts of the text to combine together to make a book (see Figures 7-12). Supported by the teaching assistant, this group's starting point was to order the pictures into the story sequence and orally re-tell the story as a group. Throughout the week's work, both Tammy and Cordelia modelled and reinforced specific grammatical features. Tammy modelled using time adverbials to help separate a narrative into 'chunks' (paragraphs) and both adults reminded the children what they knew about using descriptive vocabulary and the importance of making language choices. As the children worked on their writing, Tammy and Cordelia encouraged extending sentences using conjunctions and reminded the children to check for consistency in their verb tenses.

It was very hot at the tired Kenyan village. It was too hot to go to milk the cattle, too hot to weed the village garden and even too hot to collect the wood.

once lilla herd her mum say without water they can be no life lilla was sad.

One day, lilla's grandfather told her the secret of rain. You must climb the biggest mountain and say the sadest things. lilla set off when the tired Kenyan village was asleep. Then lilla found the biggest mountain.

lilla climed the mountain and said the sadest things. lilla told when her brother cut his leg by chasing a chicken. Then she told the sky when she burnt her fingers while helping her mum cook when she saw up the rain didnt come. lilla was sad then lilla felt a drop of rain then again until it rained. lilla joyfully lifded her hands up and ran strait home. when she got home her village was celebrating the the rain came. lilla had saved the village.

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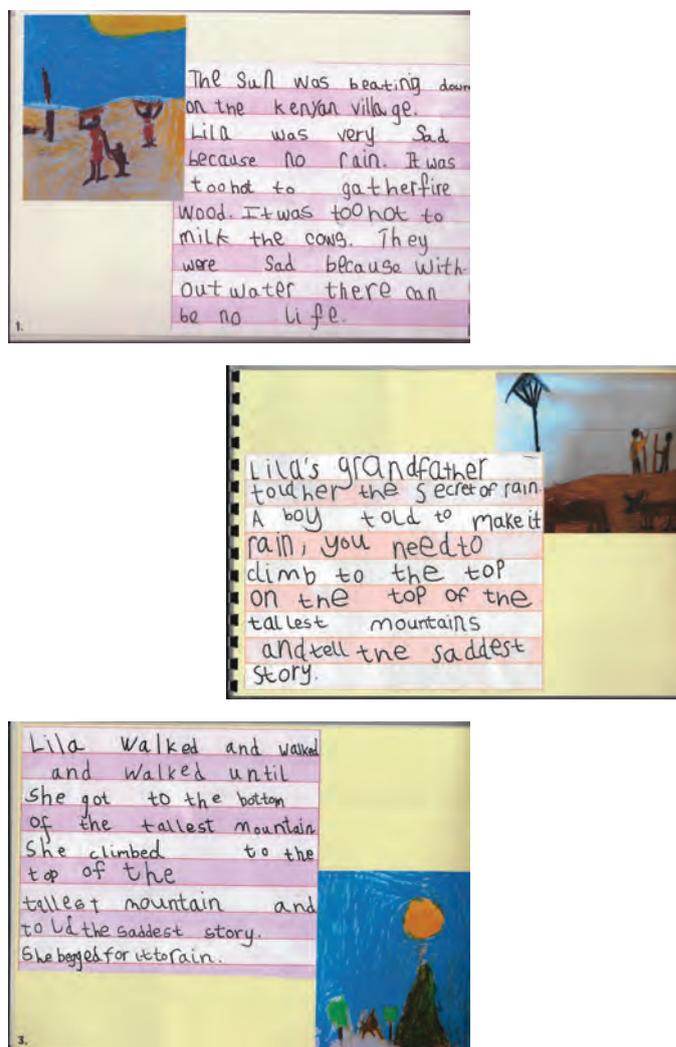
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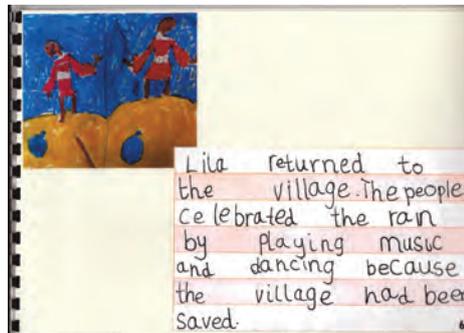
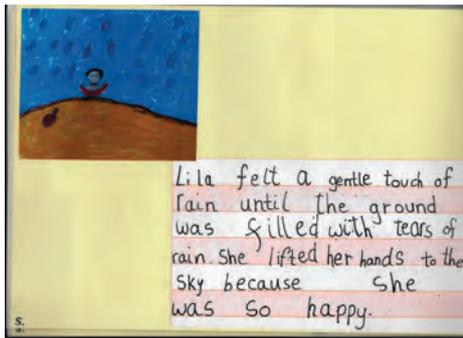
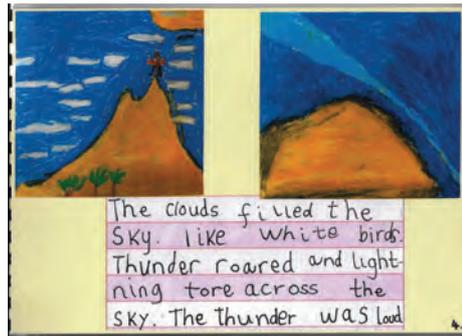
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Figure 6: Zubaydah's full story using paragraphs (with a transcription)





Figures 7 to 12: 'Lila and the Secret of Rain' retold by Ahmed, Daanish, Darragh, Deja, Henna and Sadiq

After the work was completed, Tammy asked the children to write book reviews so that other classes might be encouraged to read the book (See Figure 13).

Did you like the book?

I gave the book five stars because I loved how David Conway used repetition for example, when Lila was on the mountain begging for rain, there was a drop of rain and another and then another. I felt so happy that the people were saved.

What does the book make you think about?

It makes me think about how lucky I am. I live in a country where I can turn the tap on for water or go to the shop to buy food.

Figure 13: a transcription of an extract from Ronav's book review

As a summary of the work over the entire teaching sequence, the class drew characters from the story and wrote speech bubbles for a final display.



Figure 14: final display of 'Lila and the Secret of Rain'

In Tammy's class, children are supported at the point of writing through careful use of shared writing and small group teaching. Their writing from across the sequence demonstrates that the carefully chosen text; time spent exploring the book, its characters and language and the events alongside contextualised teaching of grammar has supported the children in articulating their understanding. The writing demonstrates that the children are developing their use of verb forms, multi-clause sentences punctuation and careful word choice. Their engagement and understanding of the book is reflected in their own writing.

Note

A version of this article, focusing more on Zubaydah's narrative, appears in *Teaching Grammar Effectively at Key Stage 1* by Eve Bearne, Rebecca Kennedy and David Reedy, published by UKLA (2016).

With special thanks to Tammy Round and Cordelia McKenzie, the Year 2 team at Tiverton Academy, Birmingham.

Children's book

David Conway (2009, illus. Jude Daly) *Lila and the Secret of Rain*. Frances Lincoln. ISBN 9781847800350.