

Primary English Newsletter

January/February 2026



This month's features:

- The Year of Reading: Our schools share how they have begun this year
- Tackling transcription: Another handwriting success and a spelling bee
- Be inspired: Speak Up!, Supertato, cross-curricular writing and poetry

The Year of Reading has begun. Here is a reminder of the national vision and available resources. Do make sure you have signed up.

Your national spring term 2026 resources

Discover fresh resources designed to meet your needs, whichever age group you work with. Aligned with termly planned themes, our spring term resources are designed to support teachers and practitioners to build a reading for pleasure culture In the Room.

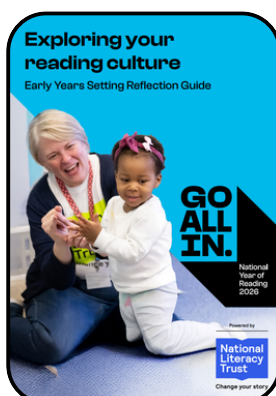
New resources for summer will expand the focus to reading In the Setting, and for autumn, to reading In the Community.

Early Years resources

- [Supporting reading in the early years: practitioner guidance](#)
- [Telling Stories in Early Years](#)
- [Chat, Play, Read: including ideas and an activity booklet in 19 languages](#)

Primary resources

- [Making Book Talk Happen](#)
- [Book Detectives](#)
- [Book Choice: empowering pupils to read for pleasure](#)



[Click here](#)



[Click here](#)

Our Professional Learning Offer 2025-26

Click on the brochure to find out more



Don't miss out on Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 English twilights with Christopher Youles sharing approaches to sentence-level teaching.

Next English Network Meeting:

Wednesday 18 March 2026,
4.15pm - 5.30pm, online.
To book a place [click here](#)

Ammana Yousef, English Team - Reading, Marner Primary School, shares the launching of their school reading challenge.



Are you ready for the
Marner Reading Challenge?!



The Marner Reading Challenge aims to inspire every child to develop a love of reading by engaging regularly with books at home.

Families are encouraged to come into school where we open up our library for parents to sit and read with their children and also encouraging visits to our local library (ideas store)

As part of the challenge, all children are provided with a core book list featuring a carefully selected range of high-quality texts.

These books are chosen to be engaging, accessible and enjoyable, allowing children to explore a variety of authors, genres and themes.

Each reading challenge highlights particular authors and illustrators. Our first challenge included a focus on illustrator Dapo Adeola and author Onjali Q. Raúf, giving children the opportunity to engage with diverse voices, styles and perspectives while developing an appreciation of both illustration and storytelling.



Once children have completed the challenge and read all the books on the list, they create a Reading River poster to reflect on and celebrate their reading journey.



From these completed challenges, winners are selected in each phase. Winners are rewarded with a visit to Foyles, Westfield, where they are given the opportunity to choose and purchase their own book, funded through the school's reading budget.

This reward reinforces the value placed on reading for pleasure and empowers children to take ownership of their reading choices.



Our latest iteration of the Reading Challenge features carefully curated book categories designed to engage children with a wide variety of texts and perspectives.

These categories include:

- **Chosen by Teachers:** Books selected for their quality, engagement and curriculum relevance.
- **Recommended by You:** Titles suggested by children, reflecting their interests and voices.
- **Celebrating Us:** Books that highlight identity, community and positive representation.
- **Relevant to Us:** Stories that connect with children's lived experiences, including themes such as refugees and migration. This category supports children in developing empathy and tolerance by exploring issues they may encounter in their local environment.
- **The Classics:** Timeless stories that build cultural knowledge and literary appreciation.

This flexible and inclusive approach ensures the challenge remains responsive to our diverse school community and the wider world children live in.

Mikki Daly, English Lead, St Agnes Catholic Primary School shares how they have started their reading year.

We have kicked off the year of reading with great enthusiasm across the school, starting with an exciting project in Year 5.

Our pupils have become book detectives, exploring the library to hunt for a wide range of genres and track down books linked to our current and upcoming class reads.

This has been a brilliant way to build curiosity, develop library skills and encourage children to step outside their usual reading choices.

We are also thrilled to welcome author Karen McCombie, who will be visiting school to speak to our Year 4 and KS1 classes. This visit will give pupils the opportunity to hear first-hand about the writing process and what inspires stories, helping to bring books to life.

Looking ahead, we have begun preparing for World Book Day by signing up for the Big Footie and Book Quiz, taking place later in March. To further support reading at home, we recently held our own school book fair, selling books at reduced prices to help every child build their own reading collection and develop a love of reading beyond the classroom.

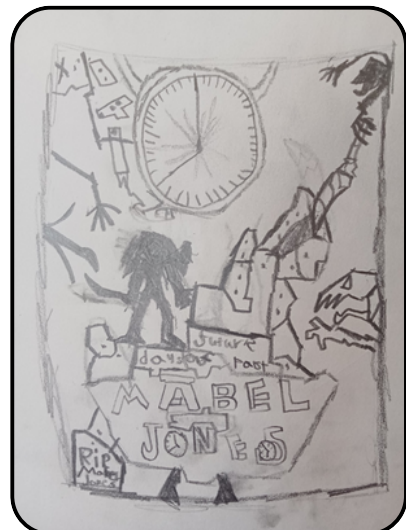
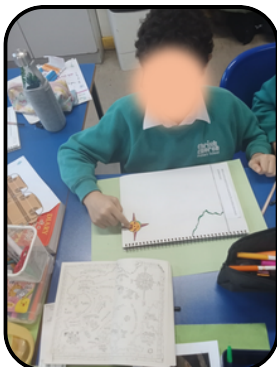
Imogen Blamires, Senior Leader and English Lead, Christ Church C of E Primary School shares how they have started their reading year.

To kick off our year of reading at Christ Church we have continued to ensure that our children are hearing a story aloud a day.

When spending time with longer texts we have begun to have a day of celebration when we have completed them and we say goodbye.

My own class have just finished the wonderful 'The Unlikely Adventures of Mabel Jones' (Will Mabbitt), by having a 'Mabel Jones' themed day.

They designed their own maps based on Mabel's world; created suitcases and belongings that we thought would work well for her next adventure; and came up with ideas for a sequel.



Articles to enjoy reading

[Interactive reading – More than just reading a book!](#)

We know that reading books and stories to young children benefits their learning and development, including their communication and language. But evidence suggests that “interactive reading” – during which an adult encourages a child to talk about the story – can be a particularly effective approach.

[Revisiting the Reading House: supporting effective reading instruction in practice](#)

Updated reading house links reading theory, assessment, practice and professional learning.



Education
Endowment
Foundation

[6 strategies to support reading for students with SEND](#)

Shared reading is vital for every student to succeed in education. Reading in the classroom helps build knowledge, develop ideas, boost vocabulary, fuel creativity, and so much more. But we know that some students with additional special educational needs can struggle to develop their reading comprehension and engage in shared reading in different ways.

Alex Quigley

Rebecca Mundy, English Curriculum Lead, Bonner Primary School shares about boosting parent engagement and student enrichment.

At Bonner Primary we have launched the Year of Reading by boosting our parent engagement and student enrichment.

Our goal is to create a consistent link between school and home learning environments. We have successfully implemented weekly “Read Together” mornings, providing a time for families to visit classrooms and share texts with their children.

We are hosting Parent Workshops and Reading Cafes which will focus on supporting strategies that parents can use to support reading fluency and comprehension at home.

Our after school Library Clubs have recently completed a project to redesign the school library, creating a more functional and enticing space. It will be open to families before and after school.



The library club visited Bethnal Green Library to research some organisational ideas.

Next month, we will also welcome author Gita Ralleigh to Bonner. She will lead whole school assemblies and provide students with an insight into her incredibly vibrant books.



Our schedule for March is jam-packed but will be incredibly fun for the children.

Hollie McDonough , Curriculum Partnership Lead,
shares the opening of the new library cabin at
The Stepney Greencoat C of E Primary School

The Stepney Greencoat school community were delighted to open their new library cabin in the school playground on Friday 6th with a ribbon cutting ceremony carried out by special guest, children's author Helen Peters - who also held a book signing after school (organised with support from the Brick lane Bookshop).



The children are encouraged to freely use the library at break and lunch times as well as timetabled sessions throughout the week.

Volunteer student librarians have been trained to support their peers in using the library and will act as role models to inspire reading for fun throughout the school.

It has been a great way to start the National Year of Reading 2026!

[*National Year of Reading 2026*](#)

Whatever you're into. Get ready to GO ALL IN.



[Click here](#)



[Click here](#)



[Click here](#)



[Click here](#)

Tom Bem-Hodgkinson, Assistant Head Teacher, Harbinger Primary School shares how their reading year has started

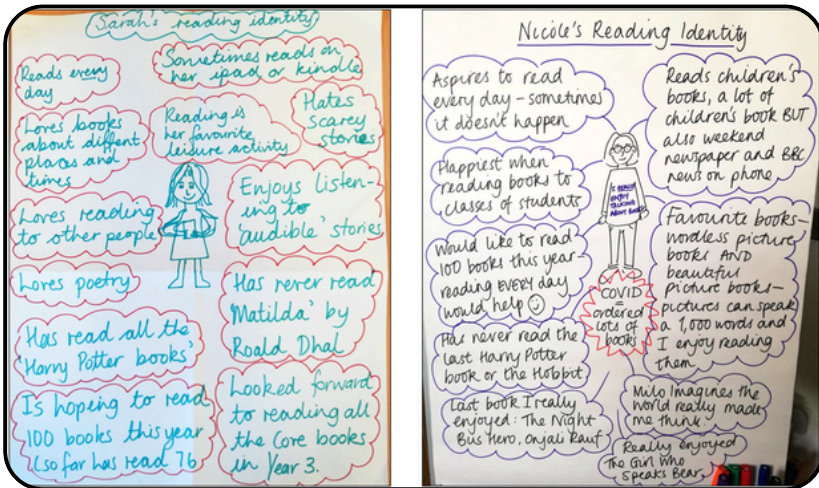
Harbinger Primary's whole-school Read-a-Thon begins on Monday 9 February! As part of 2026: The Year of Reading, the focus is on enjoying reading, building strong reading habits and raising sponsorship to help us fund the fantastic Now Press Play, bringing immersive audio learning experiences into school.

Children will be logging their reading each week, with every minute contributing to a whole-school class challenge.

Families will receive a letter and sponsorship form, with full details on how to take part.



Here some further ideas to build your Year of Reading this spring term.



Create reading identities as a staff and share with children. Then invite children to create their own. These can then be referred back to each term to see how staff and children's reading identities have grown over the year.

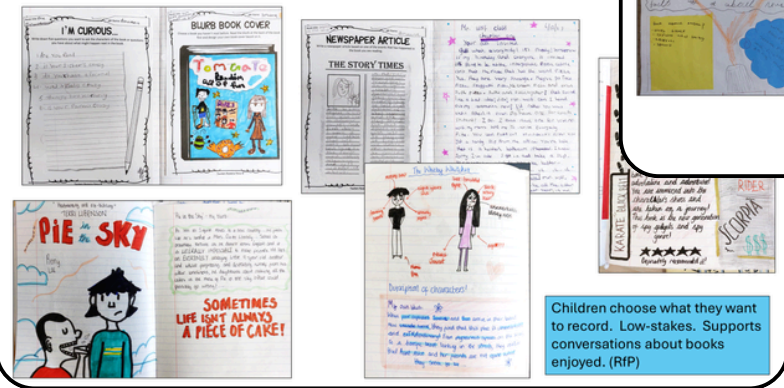
Create year group reading scrapbooks and/or reading journals.

Examples from Y5 and 6 reading scrapbooks
(Marion Richardson Primary School)



Children take it turns to take home and record what they choose about their chosen book. Every class in the school has one. (RIP)

Examples from Y5 and 6 reading journals
(Marion Richardson Primary School)



Children choose what they want to record. Low-stakes. Supports conversations about books enjoyed. (RIP)

Articles to enjoy reading

[Unlocking the power of comics: why the multimodal format is a dynamic and vital part of literacy](#)

Comics are not a diversion from literacy: they are a dynamic and vital part of it. Our recent research revealed that in the face of [steeply declining levels of engagement with reading](#), children and young people are still drawn to reading materials like comics and graphic novels. It highlights the role of comics and graphic novels as essential tools to (re)ignite enthusiasm in a pastime that is struggling to engage young people.

[Literacy teaching and school events calendar 2025-2026](#)

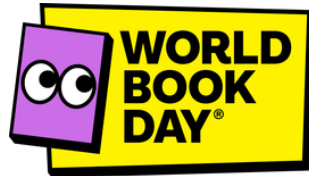
Plan your literacy year
Use our calendar ideas below to draw up your own literacy teaching plan for the term or year ahead, and explore the teaching resources provided to help you.



Change your story

“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

Stephen King



[World Book Day for educators](#)

Free classroom resources

Save time with downloadable lesson plans, activity ideas, assembly guides and printable materials designed to help you deliver an engaging World Book Day.



Events for schools and settings

Take part in live and recorded World Book Day events, including author sessions, interactive activities and special themed experiences such as the Harry Potter classroom event.

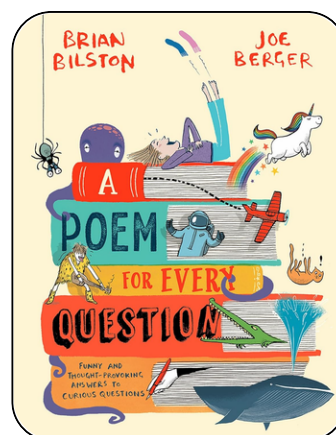
Plan your celebration

Now is the time to:

- Download and adapt your assemblies (5–11 and 11+)
- Organise Breakfast and a Book with your school community
- Explore [classroom activities and resources](#) to inspire your planning
- Book or stream digital events, including the Harry Potter classroom event

We look forward to sharing how how school engaged with World Book Day in our next newsletter.

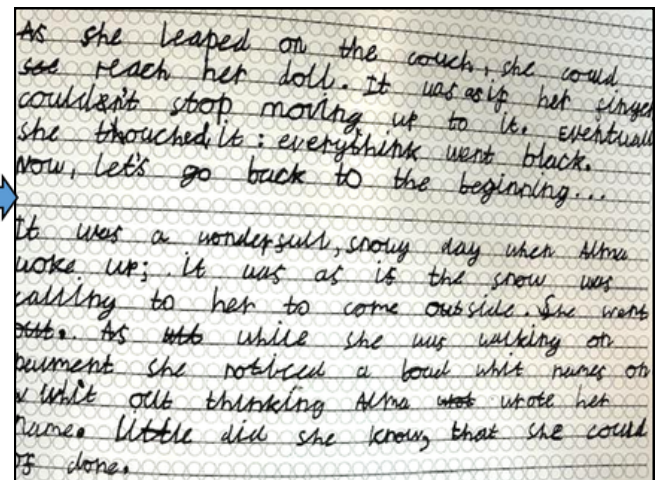
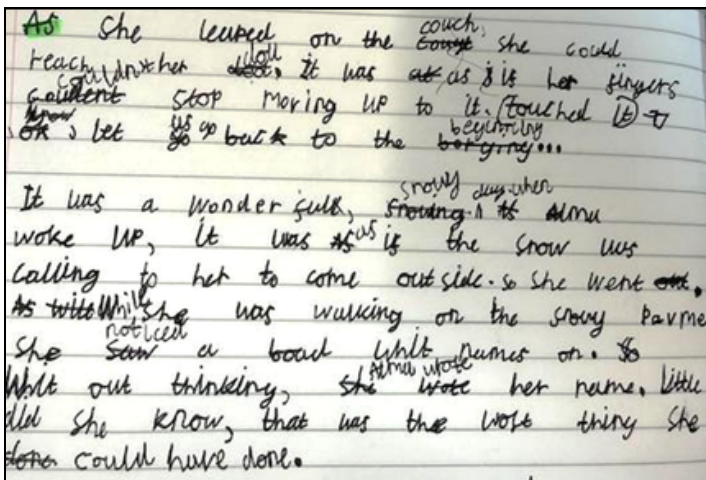
Books to explore and enjoy...



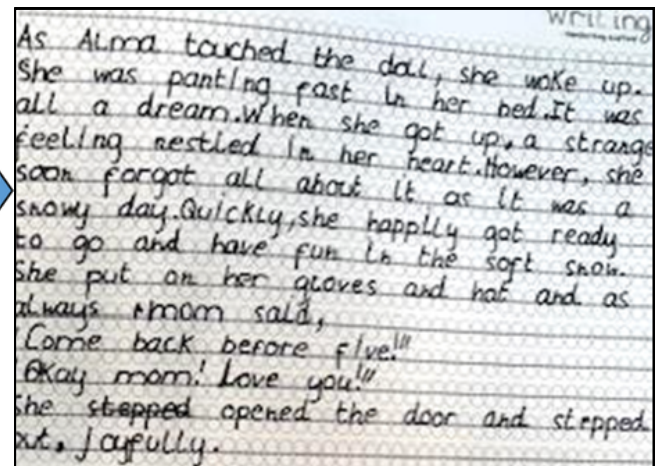
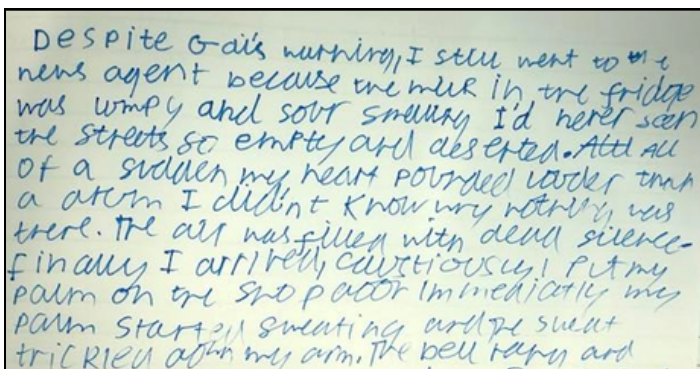
Kateryna Konstantynova, English Lead, and Gill Owen, Year 5 Teacher, Malmesbury Primary School shares about their handwriting success.

In Year 5 and Year 6, we identified a need to address the handwriting challenges we were facing. We have been using a handwriting scaffold called 'Bubble Writing' to support children to form letters consistently.

This scaffold also aids with spacial awareness when forming letters, spacing them within a word and spacing words within a sentence.



This simple scaffold provides a guide to consistently form cursive letters and ensure each letter is uniform in both height and width. Children are able to leave equal spaces between words and see clearly whether or not there is enough space at the end of each line for the next word they intend to write.



End of Year 5

Currently in Year 6

We are confident, now we have correct letter formation that adding the join back in will be successful, achieving legible, joined handwriting ready for Year 7.

We have begun using it for handwriting practice as well as to support publishing some pieces of writing.

<https://www.bubblehandwriting.co.uk/>

Read our November/December newsletter to read about how Bonner have introduced the Nelson handwriting scheme.

Fiona Keogh, Deputy Head, Harbinger Primary School shares how her school went about running their first ever spelling bee.

Instructions for Teachers

Forming Teams (Weeks 1–2)

- Each class creates teams of up to 4 children.
- Encourage mixed-attainment groups so everyone feels included.
- Share the National Curriculum key-phase spelling lists with pupils and families.

Preparing for the Class Competition (Weeks 1–4)

- Give pupils time each week to practise spellings in class.
- Suggest fun revision activities: mini-quizzes, partner spelling, word games.
- Remind pupils that all words in the competition will come directly from the key-phase spelling lists.

Running the Class Spelling Bee (Week 5)

- Each team competes against the other teams in their class.
- Use a clear, fair format:
- One word per team per round
- 10–15 seconds to confer
- One chosen speaker spells the word aloud
- Keep score on the board so pupils can follow the excitement.
- Winning team from each class progresses to the Phase Finals.

Phase Finals (Week 6)

- All class-winning teams compete against other winners in the same phase (e.g., KS1, LKS2, UKS2).
- Increase challenge by using trickier words from the same spelling lists.
- Celebrate effort as well as accuracy – certificates, applause, house points, etc.

What a wonderfully, exciting day we had for the finals. A team won from each phase and earned themselves medals and a feeling of real success.

Instructions for Children

1. Form Your Team

- Work with up to 3 friends to make a team of no more than 4.
- Choose a fun team name!

2. Learn Your Words

- All the words will come from your phase spelling list.
- Practise a little each day – at home, in class, or with your team.
- Try teaching each other the tricky ones.

3. Class Spelling Bee (Week 5)

- Your team will compete against other teams in your class.
- You'll get a word, talk about it together, and one teammate will spell it.
- Stay calm, speak clearly, and cheer each other on.

4. Phase Finals (Week 6)

- If your team wins your class round, you'll represent your class in the finals!
- It's all about teamwork, confidence, and having fun.



'It was like a real life TV show.' (Jackie, Early Years Lead)

'That was so exciting – thank you for organising it!' (Nyla, Year 6)

'Next time, I want to be in the finals. I'm going to practise spelling even more.'

(Carter, Year 4)

'Can we do this again next term?'

BE INSPIRED...

Year 1 writing, Marner Primary School

'Speak Up!' (Nathan Bryon & Dapo Adeola) got Year 1 writing about the importance of their school library.

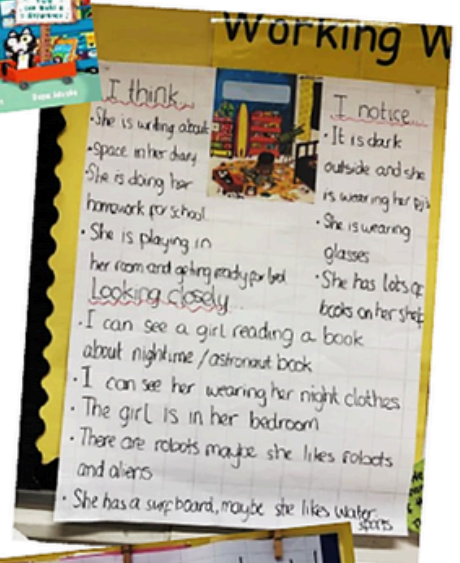
Speak Up! In year 1

The children began with structured book talk, using sentence stems such as "Looking closely..." and "I notice..." to support careful observation, discussion and the development of spoken language.



Share the picture of Rocket in the first page of the book - in her bedroom showing the reader her telescope.
Read aloud the text and ask the children to respond to what they have heard.
Explain that the girl in the image is the main character in the new book that you will be exploring together and you want to find out more about her and what the children think about her. Remember to ask WHY?

- What do we learn about her from this picture?
- what is she wearing?
- Why do you think she is wearing this?
- can it make personal connections with text
- what does this picture tell us about her?
- what do you notice about her body language?
- what does this suggest about her interests?



I think...
I notice...
Lookly closely...

How is Layla the librarian feeling?
How do you know?
Why do you think she is feeling like that?

Share enough of Layla the Librarian's letter that you can discuss the text with the class.
Ask the children why Layla is feeling like this and what she might be worried about. What do you think she might be worried about?

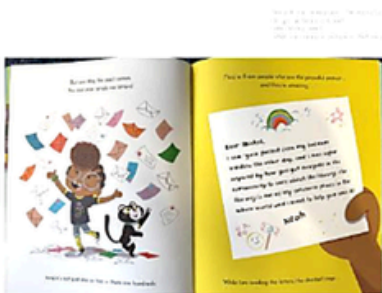


Remember we are NOT allowed to use the word sad!!!
That is a boring word :(

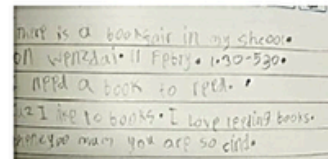
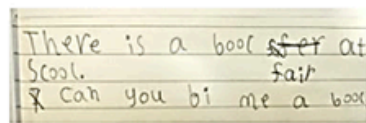
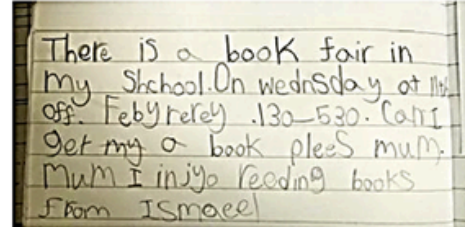
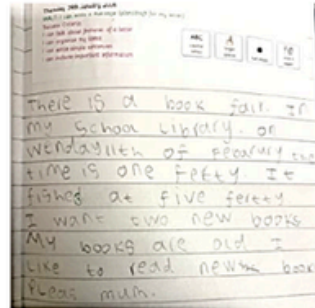
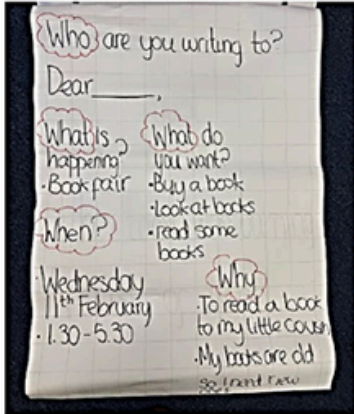


Why isn't anyone eating, food or smiling at the party?
How would you feel if the school library was closing?
What would happen if the library closed down?
What would you do if the library closed down?
What would you do to stop it closing?

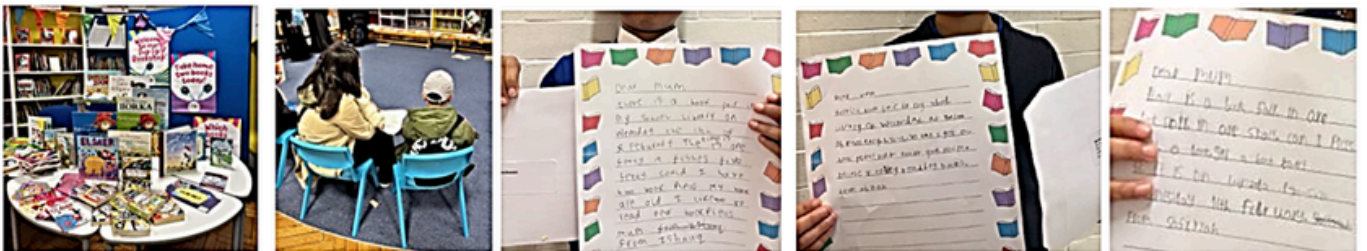
We then explored a letter received by the character Rocket from Noah. Alongside this, the children examined a range of real-life letters (school mail hoorah!), discussing their purpose and identifying key features such as the greeting, main message and ending. This helped to make the learning meaningful and showed the children how letters are used in everyday life.



Building on this learning, we turned our attention to our own school library. The children discussed the importance of libraries and considered the challenges schools face with tight budgets (Booo)! They explored what might happen if our Marner school library had to close and generated thoughtful ideas to support it and keep our library running, including bake sales, book donations and, ultimately, organising a book fair. (The book fair was already planned for to take place during our parent's conference day).



The children then applied their planning by writing persuasive letters to their parents, encouraging them to attend the school book fair during parents' conference day in order to help raise money for the school library.



To conclude the unit, the children went on a local walk to the post box, where they posted their letters home. This real-life experience gave purpose and excitement to their writing and reinforced their understanding of how written communication is used beyond the classroom.



This sequence of learning supported the development of persuasive writing skills, sentence structure, vocabulary and an understanding of audience and purpose, while also fostering a strong sense of community and responsibility.

“If you don't like to read, you haven't found the right book yet.”

J.K. Rowling

BE INSPIRED...

Year 1 writing, Marner Primary School

'Supertato' (Sue Hendra & Paul Linnet)
met Year 1!

Supertato in year 1!

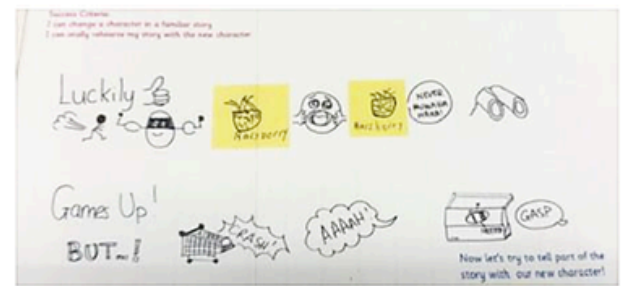
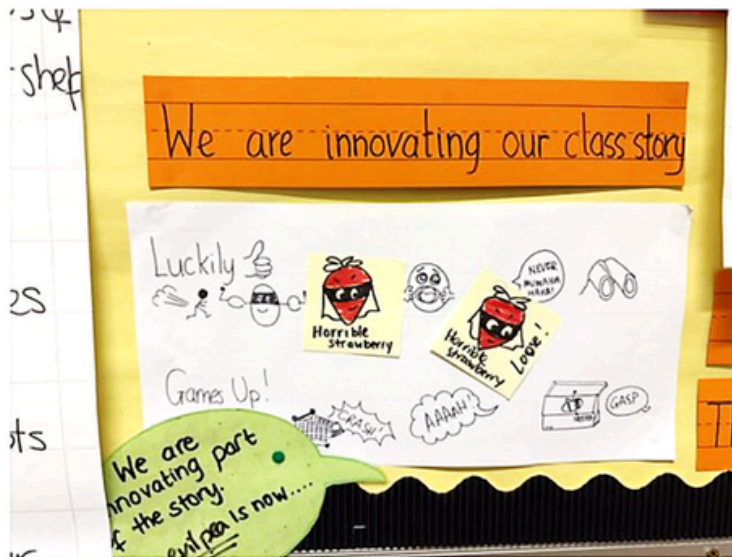
We are pleased to share an update on the English learning that has been taking place in our Year 1 class, focusing on writing through the engaging story *Supertato*.

The children began with structured book talk, developing their understanding of the story, characters and key events. This supported rich discussion and helped to build confidence in using story language.

We then moved on to story mapping, using Pie Corbett actions alongside actions created by the children themselves. Working collaboratively in groups, the children performed their story maps to the rest of the class, strengthening their oral storytelling skills and recall of the narrative.



Following this, the children innovated a section of the story by changing the character of the Evil Pea. This allowed them to use their imagination while still following a familiar story structure.



Finally, the children independently wrote their own innovated versions of the story. These pieces were carefully written and are now published in our reading corner, giving the children a sense of pride and purpose in their writing.



This sequence of learning has supported the development of vocabulary, sentence structure, creativity and confidence in writing, while maintaining high levels of engagement.

“Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be offered to them as a precious gift.”
 Kate DiCamillo

Year 6 have thoroughly enjoyed our Macbeth unit. As a short writing task, students composed letters to Lady Macbeth detailing the witches' prophecy. We wanted the letters to move beyond a simple diary entry of Macbeth recalling events; instead, students focused on the 'so what?' element. They explored how Macbeth might entice his wife by appealing to her ambition, acknowledging the significant power and influence she holds over his decisions.

Thursday 22nd January 2026
 I can choose language that shows good awareness of the reader

Event	So what?	Language feature
Winning the battle	- proved himself a hero - loyal to the King - My glory is your glory	The battle was the <u>greatest</u> moment of my entire life but it was worth it the effort seeing heads chopped the enemies.
Meeting the witches	- Supernatural creatures who selected me - Told me what I had slumped dreamed of - I've told no one else	I stumbled upon three wrinkly <u>hags</u> - being who had elongated bent noses that appeared out of thin air <u>on</u> the misty passway.

Event	So what?	Language feature
Hearing the prophecy	- They promised me the crown - That a future queen - Our ambition is now a reality	These are political things promised me the crown, we shall rule the Scottish people.
Becoming Thane of Cawdor	- This is not a dream - We shall claim the throne - I now trust the witches - This is not my imagination	If you directly feel the pride of being the wife of the Thane of Cawdor imagine the pride of being the Queen of Scotland?

How would Macbeth greet his wife?
 My dearest companion - then whom I can share my deepest secrets of my heart - I write to thee as I have a heavy secret upon me. I shall tell thee with ease.

I surge towards our castle at this very moment. Prepare your soul for the power that will most certainly be ours. Your ambitious husband, Macbeth.

I command you to set the dining table as we are about to enjoy a feast with the King.

Maggie ideas

vocabulary: possessed, momentous, destiny, thee, wretched, interlopers, elevated, eclipsed, victory, wilder dream, our greatness, fate, throne, glory that await us, hector, thine, validation

My dearest companion, those whom I can share my deepest secrets of my heart with I write to you as I have a heavy secret upon me. I shall tell thee with ease.

As of today, the battle was won. The battle was the greatest moment of my life but it was worth the effort seeing heads chopped off the enemies. I felt a sensation of glory. I had proved myself as a hero, loyal servant of the King. I had made you proud as my glory is yours. Ambition elevated me. I hasten to deliver the good news to the King and ruler of Scotland. Soon after, I and Banquo came across three fantastical, withered hags who told me that I would become Thane of Cawdor; then King of Scotland. At first, I was skeptical but then my soul ignited and I realised our ambitions were being confirmed.

When I arrived at the King's camp, one of his noble men addressed me as Thane of Cawdor. The ~~prop~~ prophecy was true. I was full of ambition; I started to trust the word of the supernatural creatures, they must be telling the truth. It's our fate to be rulers of Scotland.

I surge towards our castle at this very moment. Prepare your soul for the power that will most certainly be ours. I command you to set the dining table as we are about to enjoy a feast with the King.

Your ambitious husband, Macbeth,

My cherished companion, whom one may trust with my soul. I write to thee with the truth; a secret buried within me, a fate to be shared.

Today, we achieved victory in a fearsome battle. It was most glorious; but my weapon - my dagger, was thirsty for more blood. The King himself acknowledged me as a hero - a valiant warrior. Amidst the trenches of clashing blades the King saw greatness in me, he saw glory. Our praise and victory is accounted for thy my dear. I and Banquo exited as three wrinkled witches approached, they rested their snail hands onto their arms - their pointed noses elongated as if staring at me - their sinister grins spread across their pale faces, they began to speak a prophecy. It said I'd become Thane of Cawdor, then King of Scotland. The witches selected me, I was the chosen one. Our desires would become true and we would gain power over the whole of Scotland; I shall be king and you shall rule beside me.

I arrived at the King's Camp and they had already gifted me the title of Thane of Cawdor. The prophecy was beginning to become true, it wasn't a dream or hallucination!

Next steps:

We will support the children with mastering the 'Banquo and I' object pronouns clearly.

BE INSPIRED...

Year 6 writing, Arnhem Wharf Primary School

A poem showcasing the impact of the power of engaging contexts.
This is a pupil who has flourished through their time at the school.

Blitz and Chaos

Lifeless

The lifeless ghost town as eerie as can be
Lanterns fade; hearts hold their breath
Deafening sounds
The city listens in its skin of silence
Hurrying footsteps of pain

Explosion

In a blink of an eye nukes drop down
Buildings crumble like paper beneath iron fists
Screams of terror doom, detonate, crash
Whose house will be lost tonight?

All clear!

Ash drifts softly where laughter used to live
Homes crumble like they once lived

Agony

The bombing has passed but the pain has begun
Who is going to be missing this time?

Zubaer

Upcoming central training dates

[Book courses online](#)

Year 3 English Twilight

Wednesday 25 February 2026, 4.00pm - 5.30pm, online

Year 4 English Twilight

Thursday 5 March 2026, 4.00pm - 5.30pm, online

Year 4 English Twilight

Thursday 12 March 2026, 4.00pm - 5.30pm, online

End of KS2 Writing Moderation: Practice, Process and Training

Friday 13 March 2026, 1.00pm - 3.30pm, in person

Year 6: One Month To Go

Wednesday 26 March 2026, 4.00pm - 5.30pm, online