

# WEBSITE RESOURCE W12.6

## Case study: Using stories to support narrative structure

This case study describes the first phase of a longer teaching sequence.

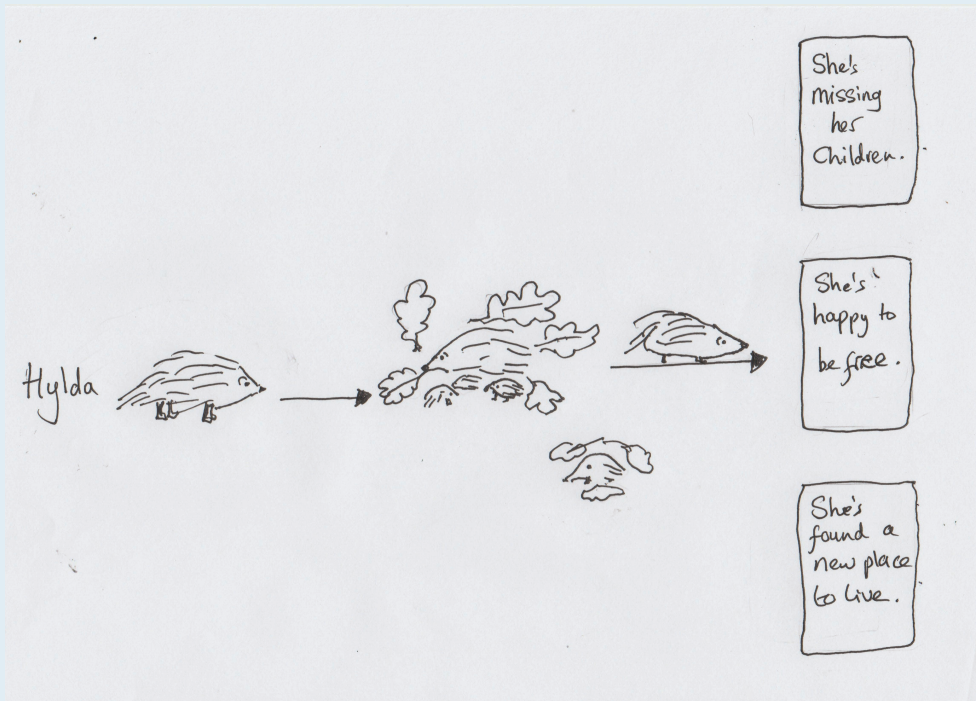
As a means of rounding off the year's work, Ben planned for his class of seven and eight year olds to combine an author study with comparing narrative structures. He chose to focus on *A Narrow Squeak and Other Animal Stories* and *The Sheep Pig* by Dick King-Smith. He planned for the children to write stories with chapters, which offered an ideal opportunity to assess how well the whole year's writing composition objectives had been met. The sequence would last for four weeks with a focus on familiarisation with the author's works during the first phase, including shared reading, storytelling, talk and drama. For this phase, he planned to spend two sessions on each of three of the short stories. The second phase would last just over a week, reading and responding to *The Sheep Pig*, with a week for the final phase – extended writing. Ben wanted the children to read stories that are structured in different ways in order to fulfil the following objectives for narrative writing:

- plan writing by using stories they have read to support narrative structure
- create settings, characters and plot
- sustain a third person narrative
- punctuate dialogue accurately
- evaluate and edit by assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing and suggesting improvements.

Since Dick King-Smith is both a prolific and a popular children's author, the class were familiar with some of his stories. Before taking a close look at his work, the class compiled a list, displayed on the wall, of stories by Dick King-Smith that they knew, including the film *Babe*. Ben prepared the reading area of the classroom with a range of his books and audio files of readings of his stories.

After discussion of what the class knew already about Dick King-Smith, including the fact that animals are central to his stories, Ben read 'Norty Boy' to the

class, stopping after the first paragraph to ask the class how they think Hylde might bring up her hedgepiglets 'very strictly'. Reading on, he stopped again at the end of the paragraph '. . . and curled up tight and shut their eyes and went to sleep.' asking the class what they thought would happen to Norty as he was left out in the cold. After finishing the reading, the class compared their possible endings with Dick King-Smith's ending. In reviewing the structure of the story, Ben asked the children to recall some key events. This story has a linear structure so as they contributed, he wrote their ideas on a timeline on the board, which he transferred to the working wall.

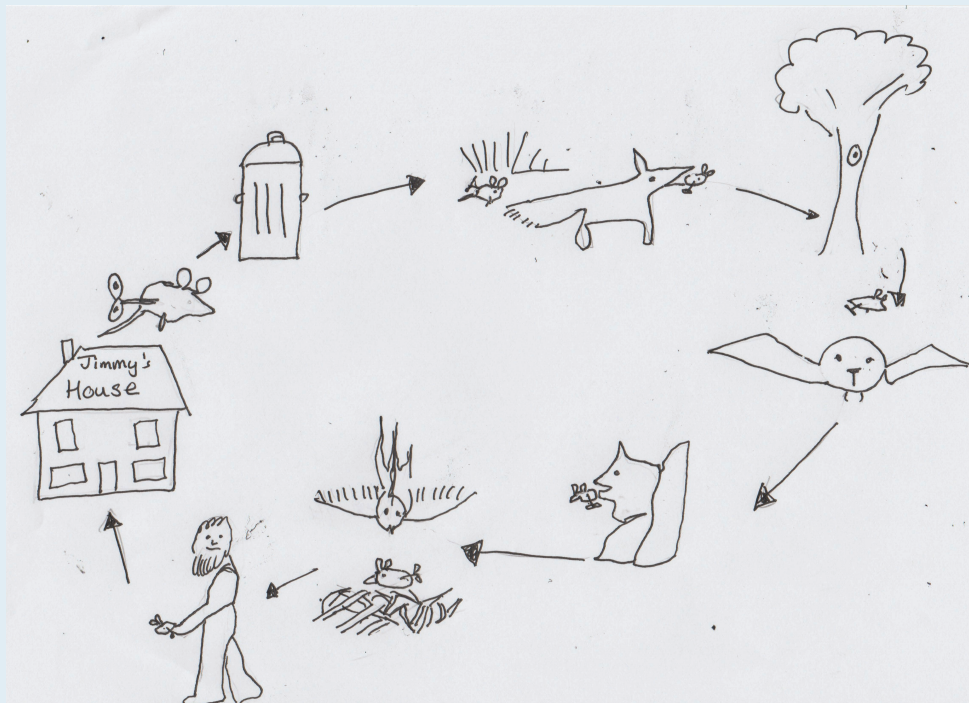


**Figure W12.6.1** Linear story map 'Norty Boy' with annotations

In the following session, Ben returned to the story, re-reading the two opening paragraphs, asking the children to notice how Dick King Smith tells readers about Hylde's character, noting the descriptive language. He then re-read the section when the family comes out of hibernation beginning: 'Oh, Herbert,' said Hylde. 'I feel so sad' to, 'I'd be the happiest hedgepig ever.' And asked the children: *How does Dick King-Smith make us feel towards Hylde? Do we feel sympathy with her when she stomps off?* He re-read the sections where Herbert speaks and asked the class why they thought Dick King-Smith had written a character who just repeats one sentence. Ben hot-seated himself as Hylde so that he could add details to her character. Finally, he asked the class to suggest what Hylde might be thinking or

doing now and they wrote their ideas on sticky notes which they attached to the end of the storyline.

In the third session, Ben read 'The Clockwork Mouse', which is a circular story as the mouse, after several adventures, returns to Jimmy's house. As he read each episode of the mouse's journey, he built a circular story map, noting each place the mouse goes to:



**Figure W12.6.2** Circular story map 'The Clockwork Mouse'

They then re-read the story, and he asked the class about the differences between the linear structure of 'Norty Boy' and the circular structure of this story.

In the following session, Ben asked the children in small groups to recall the story using the story map as a guide and to add notes about the animals and people who played a part in the mouse's journey. When they were not sure, Ben re-read the appropriate section. This is a story told in the third person, so in order to focus on the differences between first and third person narrative, using the story map, he demonstrated how the mouse might tell the opening part of the story in the first person. He asked the children, in pairs, to continue re-telling it from the mouse's point of view, each pair selecting a particular episode and using the story map as a guide. Some of their stories were shared at the end of the session.

'The Happiest Woodlouse' was the final story of the first week. This is a problem-resolution story whose central character, Walter, is a very timid woodlouse. As with

many stories like this, the 'problem' seems to be resolved until there is a complication and the problem reasserts itself. In order to get the class thinking about story structure, after the first two sentences, Ben just wrote 'problem' on the board without comment then asked the class how they thought Dick King-Smith might develop Walter's character. He stopped at the point where Marilyn enters the story and wrote 'resolution?' on the board. He asked the class what they thought each of these words might mean in terms of the story and why he had put a question mark after 'resolution'. Together, the class worked out that the problem was Walter's fearfulness and the apparent resolution was his developing friendship with Marilyn. When he asked them if it was all going to be 'happy ever after' now, they showed their implicit understanding of this kind of story structure by suggesting that there were going to be more problems. Reading on, Ben stopped at the point where Marilyn tells him that she can't stand a wimp and wrote on the board 'complication', asking the children what the complication was. They correctly identified that fact that Walter thought he had found a friend who would make him feel brave but that he had lost her friendship. Stopping there, he asked the children to write in role as Walter about how he feels about Marilyn rejecting him. He then left the story on a cliff-hanger over the weekend.

At the beginning of the next session, the class reprised the story so far and Ben drew the children's attention to the words 'problem', 'resolution?' and 'complication' that he had written during the previous session. In pairs the children speculated about how Dick King-Smith might resolve the complication to the problem and Ben read on to where Marilyn thanks Walter for saving her life. He wrote 'resolution' on the board and read on to the end, writing 'ending' on the board. After talking about how well their own speculations fitted Dick King-Smith's resolution and ending, the class discussed the difference between the resolution and the ending of a story, coming to the conclusion that the resolution was how the problem was solved and the ending was very similar to 'and they all lived happily ever after'.

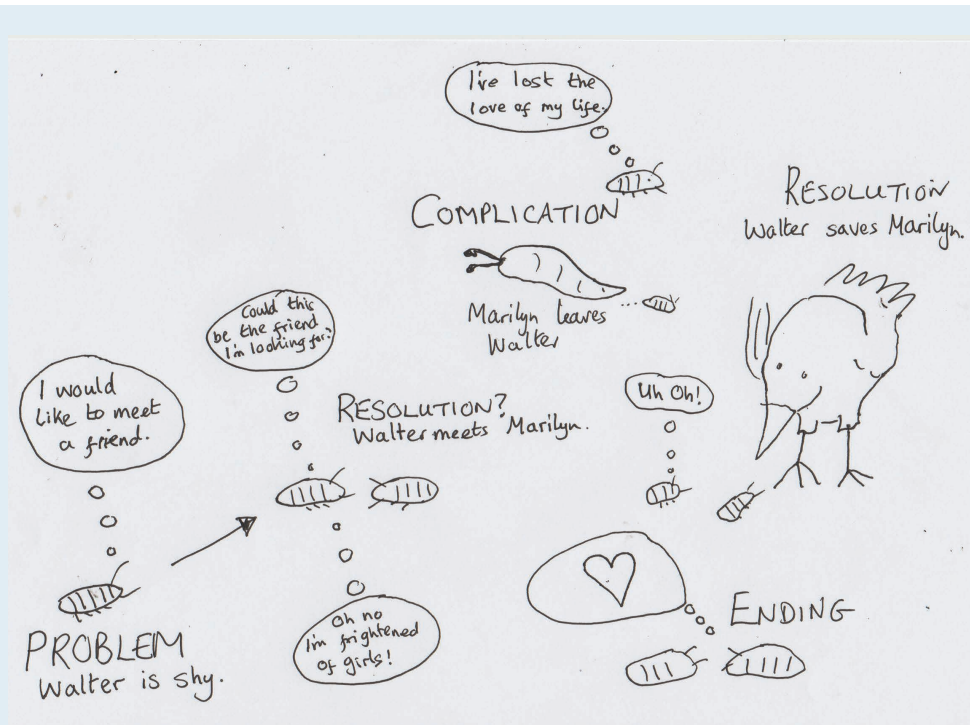
With the episode structure:

problem resolution? complication resolution ending

on the board, Ben re-read the story, asking the children to notice when the author tells the reader what Walter is thinking. After the re-reading, they wrote what they remembered as thought bubbles and attached them to the relevant episodes of the story.

There is only one place where the reader is told about Marilyn's thoughts so Ben asked the class, in pairs, to role play what Marilyn would have been thinking at the same time as the thoughts they had recorded for Walter. After hearing contributions, he selected some, attaching them to the story map alongside Walter's thoughts. He asked volunteers to read these as dialogues.

In the next session, Ben displayed the three story maps, using them to talk about the different kinds of story structure that an author might use. To consolidate ideas he modelled drafting a story based on a linear structure then asked the children to work in small groups to make up a circular story, just noting key events. He and the teaching assistant circulated the groups to check that the children had the idea of the structure of this kind of story.



**Figure W12.6.3** Problem-resolution story map 'The Happiest Woodlouse' with annotations

Before starting on the second phase of the sequence, as a starting point to thinking about the author's distinctive qualities, Ben asked the children to think about what each of the stories might have in common. They identified an interest in animals, the fact that the central characters experienced problems and happy endings – although they weren't too sure about whether Hylda's was a happy ending! The rest of the teaching sequence was taken up with reading and responding to *The Sheep Pig* and writing a third person narrative, with dialogue and at least two chapters which, the children were reminded, could be structured in whatever way suits the events being described.

## References

- King-Smith, Dick (1995) *A Narrow Squeak and Other Animal Stories*. Young Puffin. ISBN 9780140349634.  
 King-Smith, Dick (2010) *The Sheep Pig*. Puffin. ISBN 9780141332352.