

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Introduction

If two heads are better than one, what are 30 heads worth? (*Or however many in the class*). Teacher displays a on OHT, whiteboard or poster a personage likely to capture the interest of the class, (*not a famous one to begin with, so that story lines are not limited*). The class is invited to invent a name, personal details and a storyline for the person, drawing upon the bank of language they have between them. Teacher writes up the first word **Voici...** (*qui est-ce?*). If there are several suggestions, class decides on one, but teacher doesn't write it up. *Qui sait/peut écrire son nom?* Chosen volunteer writes up the name. Teacher asks the class, *C'est bien? C'est correct?* If someone doesn't agree, he/she comes up to the board (original scribe sits down) and corrects the mistake. Teacher asks the class again, *C'est ça?* If it's now right the current scribe can continue, otherwise another corrector comes out. Only if everyone in the class fails to find the right answer does the teacher intervene with a mini-lesson.

Boys, in particular, relish a challenge, so corrections and interventions by pupils can be presented in this light. The scribe can also be challenged to give the meaning of a word he/she has used. (*Que veut dire...?* or whatever phrase you customarily use.)

In the early stages, the teacher provides a structure for the story by asking questions, by adding connecting words to prompt further information (for example: *Il porte une chemise bleue et...*), or by writing a prompt using words already encountered. (e.g. *Un jour... / Il pense ... / Mais.. ./ Alors, il rencontre...*).

Reading aloud/phonics

To begin with, teacher uses reading aloud 'the story so far' to give new opportunities for pupils to revise and internalise the sounds of the words used. Eventually, ask for volunteers and use their mistakes as opportunities for identifying and re-teaching phonic patterns. Use the 'challenge' system again, so the teacher is not seen as the only fount of knowledge. This review of the phonic system will help them when they come to spell accurately when they come to write the words for themselves.

Extension

Once a simple, correct story is on display, the class can be invited to improve it structurally, by adding further details, or in ways that recall recent or previous learning (e.g. by adding adjectives/adverbs/direct speech, etc.). Older classes might want to consider transposing the story into a more appropriate tense. The teacher is best placed to know if these additional task are better carried out by whole class work or to change the pace by asking for these tasks to be done in groups. It's always best to work the first couple of examples together, though, to be sure everyone knows what to do.

Group work

Same rules apply as for class work. Group calls teacher over only when no one in the group is sure of the correct word/spelling, etc., or when the work is complete and ready for checking.

Once the procedure is well established, groups can use different pictures as starting points, or provide their own. Teacher can set parameters for the piece of writing, which can be in the form of instructions (*The story must be in the past tense / It must include some examples of reflexive verbs/ direct/speech/pronouns - or whatever is the current topic*) or a writing frame can be provided (with prompts for headings, like: Personal details / What did he decide to do / Who did she meet? / Conversation? / How did it end?)

For a change, the stories can be written like consequences, with each person writing a sentence and passing on to the next person to continue the story, and so on. This will generate many new stories for pupils to share with others, giving additional scope for reading and comprehension.

Homework

Individual work can of course be set for homework, to re-tell or improve the story worked on in class or to tell their own version of the story with whatever embellishments they can muster. This allows pupils to work at their own level, so treat the results as opportunities to judge attainment levels and provide individual feedback. Once again, use the new stories that emerge to furnish additional texts for reading silently, reading aloud or for display.

ICT

Pupils who have the opportunities and keyboard skills to wordprocess their writing often write more, and more accurately, than those who scribe by hand. If collaborative writing can be carried out around an interactive whiteboard, or in groups around a computer, so much the better.

Showcasing

Provide opportunities for good individual or collaborative work to be displayed by, e.g.:

- reading aloud by pupil (if willing and able)
- reading aloud by a peer (if willing, able, and chosen by the author)
- reading aloud by teacher (with permission)
- pin up on wall in the classroom or foyer
- at parents' evening
- on school website

NOTE This approach to collaborative writing is intended for occasional use, but several of the principles it employs, once understood by pupils, can be used in other contexts.