

Writing Development Tips for mini saga writing

Generating Ideas

Ask pupils to work in small groups of 3 or 4 to discuss ideas of what their stories could be about. Bouncing off one another is a great way to generate new ideas as different people contribute different things, and this can spark inspiration. They can then write their stories separately, or write one together. If they write individual stories ask them to compare them to each other – did they write similar stories or did they end up wildly different?

start at the end

It may seem strange, but if pupils write the ending first they have something to aim for, and will have a better idea of what needs to happen in the middle of the story to get their characters to the ending they've written.

Chain Reaction

All good stories start with an 'inciting incident' – something happens! The best stories then progress because of the way characters react to that event. A good plot should be like a line of dominoes or a chain reaction – when the first event happens, it has a knock-on effect.

Instead of a story being: 'This happened, then this, then this, and finally this.'

It should be: 'This happened, which caused this, which then made this happen which gives us this ending.'

Ask pupils to write down the main events of their story. Do they lead on from one another or are they quite separate? Ask them to try to turn the events into a chain reaction before writing out the full story.

Expanding Vocabulary

Ask pupils to use a thesaurus to find stronger, more specific word choices. Be careful though! Some of the words it suggests will have a slightly different meaning. Ask them to use a dictionary to double check the new word still makes sense in the sentence.

Be Specific

A really easy way to improve writing by using richer vocabulary is by asking pupils to be specific. Using more precise words to describe what is happening or the scene can lift a piece of writing. It gives the reader a clearer image in their mind, and sometimes using fewer words too!

E.g.

He ran quickly – He sprinted

Plants covered the gravestones – Ivy covered the gravestones

He gave her a bunch of flowers – He gave her a bunch of tulips

She walked carefully into the old, crumbling building – She crept into the derelict church

Ask pupils to check over their work and see if there are any words that could be more specific.

Pace

The atmosphere and tone of a story can be shown by the length of sentences which indicate pace. Short sentences are quicker and give a speedy, urgent tone. Longer sentences with conjunctions give a slower, calmer tone. E.g.

Bang! Crash! He ran. Doors slammed behind him. There was no way out.

He went through the house, checking each door as he went but they were all locked. He realised there was no way out.

Can your pupils see the difference in the two examples? Ask them to think about which style would work best for their story.

Sentence starters

Challenge pupils to alter how their sentences begin by using a range of fronted adverbials:

- When e.g. before; after; at midnight; yesterday
- Where e.g. under; behind; at the...
- How e.g. suddenly; quietly; carefully, angrily

Neat As Can Be

Ask pupils to write their rough ideas/draft in a workbook. Then when they have edited and polished their story they can write the final version on the worksheet using their best, neatest handwriting. Remind them if the editors can't read their writing, we won't be able to accept it!

Pupils could ask someone who isn't familiar with their writing to read it – are there any words that they found difficult to read? Write them out neater if so!

Pupils can practise using unjoined handwriting when filling in their name and school details on the form. Use block capitals so that it's really clear to make sure we spell names correctly!

Proofreading

Ask pupils to read their story backwards! When the brain isn't concentrating on the overall sentences or plot, you are more likely to spot spelling mistakes.

Use a dictionary to check any spellings that they are unsure of.

If pupils have typed their work, ask them to change the font and reread – just seeing it in a different font can be enough of a change to help them spot any spelling or grammar errors!

Consistency is Key

Are all the character and place names spelt the same way throughout the story?

Have they used the same tense (past or present) throughout the story?

Have they used the same perspective (first or third person) throughout the story?

Does it make sense?

Get pupils to work in pairs and read each other's stories out loud. This will allow both the reader and the writer to pick up on any sentences that aren't clear, or any parts that don't make sense. Ask the reader to give feedback on any parts of the story that they think are unclear or don't make sense.

Perform It!

With pupils working in small groups, ask them to pick one of their stories within the group and create a short performance. One person can read out the story while the others act it out. This can be done within groups or in front of the whole class. Using intonation and emphasis when reading aloud can help them to express meaning and understanding to the audience.

Higher Level

Subject-Verb Agreement

Do sentences all have the right verb form to match the subject, depending on if it is singular or plural? E.g. 'The dog eats the food' vs 'The dogs eat the food'.

Précising Work

One of the main challenges with a 100-word mini saga is fitting all the story in. Get pupils to practise this by writing out lines or paragraphs of their story and then seeing if they can summarise them into fewer words (précising) without losing the overall meaning.

Example:

I ran quickly through the wintery forest, running through the leaves on the ground and ducking underneath branches as they clawed at the cloak I was wearing.

Changed to:

I sprinted through the forest. Leaves crunched under my feet and bare branches clawed at my cloak.

This has saved 10 words. It may not sound like a lot but that's 10% of the word count, and no meaning is lost – the reader has the same information.

