

**GUIDANCE on: Storyline Scotland**

***Large parts of this guidance are taken from resources produced by Sallie Harkness and Steve Bell of Storyline Scotland.***

***With many thanks for Sallie’s ongoing help and support***

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**Owner: Clare Bryden**

**Rationale**

*“when children write about what they already know, they already have the information at their fingertips – they are full of confidence. This allows them to think about how to write it instead of having to concentrate on* what *it is they are being asked to write”*

*literacy for pleasure: wordpress.com*

In the Argyll and Bute Guidance document, *10 Strategies for the effective teaching of writing*, the importance of meaningful contexts is emphasised and a key element of Storyline is that it creates contexts over which the children feel ownership. However, even more importantly, it ensures that all children are approaching writing from a shared position of understanding, thus supporting pupils who may be approaching tasks with less experience or understanding as a result of their background and creating equity in literacy activities.

It also supports an interdisciplinary approach, reflecting the important point that writing, reading, talking and listening happen in all areas of the curriculum, not just in designated ‘literacy’ times. By adopting a Storyline approach practitioners can ensure that literacy is seen as being at the heart of all learning.

**Storyline Scotland – Background Information**

* 1965 – Primary School in Scotland published by HMSO. Integration of subjects, group work, differentiation, active child-centred learning.
* 1967 – Jordanhill College Staff Tutor Team established to support implementation.
* 1968 – 1980 – Development work in schools and workshop courses for teachers – Staff Tutor Topics.
* 1988 – Staff Tutor topic work renamed STORYLINE.

**Storyline: an introduction**

Just as a story comprises a beginning, characters & setting, key incidents and an ending, so a Storyline plan creates a clear structure onto which all learning can be hung. It is a particularly useful vehicle for writing, talking and listening skills, but it is also an ideal opportunity to create genuine interdisciplinary opportunities for learning in the classroom.

Some key benefits to using a Storyline approach are:

* Interdisciplinary thinking and learning
* Active, enquiry-based learning
* A wide range of learning opportunities
* Creativity and imagination at its heart
* Pupil ownership of the learning context
* Promotes and models good citizenship
* Suitability for single stage or multi-composite contexts

Storyline’s use within Argyll and Bute schools has led to the following key areas of positive impact:

* Pupil engagement and motivation
* Pupil attainment in talk and writing
* Teacher enjoyment

**Storyline Outline**

Over the course of a Storyline you will go through the following elements:

* Choice of topic
* Decision about opening hook (and potentially other hooks)
* Key questions to begin (and ongoing)
* Creating the context (exactly how you do this will vary from topic to topic)
* Creating key incidents & guiding the activities around them
* Culminating event
* Pupil review of learning

**Storyline: Choosing a topic**

At the heart of Storyline lies a key topic or idea. Storyline can be used to support any area of the curriculum, with other curricular elements woven into it.

Sample topics:

***People, past events & societies***: Vikings, Medieval Castle, Victorians, Scottish Wars of Independence, Ancient Egypt

***People, place & environment***: Rainforest, Seashore, Plastics, Greenpeace, New neighbours

***People, society, economy & business***: Election, Volcano, Tsunami, Restaurant, Flower Shop, Trucking, Hospital

***Languages***: Bus tour, family holiday

***Sciences:*** Polar expedition, the spaceship,

***Technologies:*** society in the future

***Book-based***: any class novel

***Fantasy:*** Land of Storybook, the dragon’s kingdom

**Opening hook**

It can be helpful to have an initial ‘hook’ to introduce the topic and engage the pupils’ interest. This could take different forms:

* A letter from a local councillor / MSP asking for the class’s help
* A letter announcing that you’ve won a prize
* A newspaper article (real or made up)
* A video message
* A notice on the classroom door
* A photograph or picture
* A surprise message from someone coming into the class (‘it’s escaped . . . ‘)

Depending on how you structure your approach, other hooks could be built in – for example, with a younger class you could have different letters hidden in different places for the children to find each day.

When you have visual settings and characters, you could add to them in some way (e.g. graffiti) to spark the next incident NB Do not damage children’s work directly – use a sticker / blutack or damage your own work!

**Key Questions**

Questions at this stage are likely to be about establishing prior knowledge. They should be open to enable full, rich responses. However, teachers should also be mindful of the level of ‘fantasy’ they are willing to accept. While a visitor centre might have a swimming pool full of sharks on its roof, is this really reflective of what a visitor centre is? Perhaps, for the purposes of what you are doing, it is OK to have Peppa Pig on the moon. Perhaps it is not. While pupil ownership of context is important, the teacher remains in control. However, at the heart of a successful Storyline must be an atmosphere of trust, where the pupils feel that their views are respected and responded to, so ideas should not be rejected out of hand. The teacher’s response to the pupil ideas is a key area of skill.

Possible questions might include:

* What is a restaurant?
* What would you find in a visitor centre?
* What kind of people visit a museum?
* What kind of things have you heard about the moon?
* What do you picture when you think about Italy?

NB Careful thought should be given to key questions– for example, ‘What would you see in your ideal house?’ is very different from ‘What would you see in your ideal home?’

The answers to questions should be recorded and may be used to establish key elements of teaching that are needed at this stage.

As you progress through the topic it will be necessary to continue to ask open ended questions to elicit further detail, to establish understanding, to encourage further analysis and so on.

**Creating the Context**

Once you have established pupil understanding of the topic, it is time to create the context visually. You might begin with a specific setting or you might begin with the characters who are going to be involved.

***Setting***

In some cases it will be important to create a setting first. Children will work in groups on this and there are different ways to approach it:

Materials

* Junk modelling
* Drawings / paintings
* Plans (to scale or not, depending on level of class)
* Maps
* Aerial views
* Artist impressions
* Fold-out plans (outside of building folds up to reveal inner plan)

Organisation

* Different groups choose how they want to create their setting
* Each group does it the same way
* Each group designs the whole thing
* Each group is given a part of the whole to create

Groups can be free choice, organised according to age, across ages etc.

***Characters***

Each pupil has responsibility for creating a character who is involved in some way. Key questions / research / teaching might be needed to elicit understanding of the type of people likely to be part of this Storyline. Possibilities include:

* Visitors e.g. to a museum
* Staff e.g. of a restaurant, a space station, a visitor centre
* Members of an expedition e.g. scientists (prior research might be needed here)
* Members of a family
* Aliens
* Fantasy characters

Ways to create characters:

* Full size – draw round a child (probably best to then create one character for a whole group)
* Figures of various sizes
* Head and shoulders
* Cloth, buttons, coloured paper, tape, ribbon etc can all be used to support this.

*Character profiles*

Information should be included about the characters. Sample ideas include:

* Name
* Age
* Nationality
* Profession
* Interests
* Likes
* What annoys them
* A secret no-one knows
* Personality

Character profiles can be presented in note form, as an information box, as a longer piece of writing. Important things to remember:

* Each character must be able to talk (i.e. no pets or babies)
* No-one is allowed to kill off someone else’s character in a piece of writing without asking permission
* The teacher can have a character too (or may introduce other characters at later points)

The class discussion as pupils present their characters is likely to be rich and will already throw up all kinds of interesting possibilities for the ways the character might react.

**Key Incidents**

This is the heart of the Storyline approach. It is through judicious selection of the key incidents that you will shape the learning experiences. You can come up with ideas of what incidents might occur yourself, but at the heart of Storyline is pupil ownership so it is important to allow some flexibility here – you can use many different incidents as a way into the learning that you want to happen and the impact on pupil motivation when they take ownership of the direction of the story is remarkable.

Think of key incidents that might happen with the contexts you have created. One way might be to think of both positive and negative incidents.

Visitor Centre examples of key incidents:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| POSITIVE | NEGATIVE |
| An opening ceremony | Food poisoning |
| 2 members of staff get married | The toilets overflow |
| The queen comes to visit | A visitor makes a complaint |
| You get some lottery funding | Plastic washes up from the river  |
| You win a prize | The playground is condemned |
| A rare bird is sighted | A child gets lost |
| A member of staff becomes pregnant | The centre is vandalised overnight |

This is where the interdisciplinary aspects of your Storyline really come into focus: skills such as budgeting, investigating, researching, creating can be used in a wide variety of contexts.

To support planning, you can use the incidents grid to think about how you might use the incident to support writing (or other learning) opportunities (appendix 1):

|  |
| --- |
| **Way of Telling**  |
| **Incident** | Lost child | *Risk assessment* | *Instructions* | *Diary from different perspectives* | *Twitter feed* |
| Lottery funding | *Role play* | *Diary* | *Narrative* | *Newspaper report* |
| Vandalism | *Police report* | *Interviews with suspects* | *Diary* | *Newspaper report* |
| Opening Ceremony | *Invitations* | *Posters* | *Speech* | *Narrative from character’s perspective* |
| Plastics wash up | *Discussion piece* | *Report* | *Persuasive speech / article* | *Diary* |
| Wedding | *Invitations* | *Wedding speech* | *Twitter feed* | *Thank you letters* |

IDL planning can take place around key incidents, supported by resources such as the Royal Society of Chemistry’s science ideas webs: <http://www.rsc.org/learn-chemistry/resource/listing?searchtext=%22Primary+collection%3A+science+ideas+webs%22&eMediaType=MED00000009>



***Planning for a range of needs / stages***

The teacher can decide how best to approach the incidents, but there are many options available which suit the needs of a multi-composite class or one with a wide range of needs. For example:

* All pupils work on the same incident and create the same outcome (whether produced individually or as a group)
* All work on the same incident but present it in different ways
* Different groups work on different incidents but create the same outcome
* An ‘umbrella’ incident is given but there is flexibility between groups (e.g. your family goes out to dinner and something happens)
* Groups have free choice as to incident and outcome
* Some groups have more choice than others; some groups have more scaffolding and support

***Timing***

It is possible for a Storyline to continue forever, following more and more permutations. However, it is up to the teacher to establish a suitable timeframe and number of incidents through the Storyline.

**Culminating event**

Just as stories come to an end, so too must the Storyline context. It is important that the children’s learning is celebrated and that a meaningful context is created for this.

Possible ideas include:

* A trip to a local related location
* An external visitor
* A recreation of part of the topic in the classroom for other classes to visit e.g. a café, shop, museum
* An open day for parents
* An assembly
* An exhibition

**Pupil review of learning**

It is important that pupils have the opportunity to reflect on the skills they have used and the learning that has taken place. Schools will have their own self-evaluative processes, but the following questions may also be helpful:

* What was enjoyable?
* If you did it again, what would you do differently?
* Was there anything you didn’t enjoy?
* Have you anything yet to learn?

These evaluations should feed into the future planning for the pupils.

**Comments from Argyll and Bute practitioners on the use of Storyline in their classroom:**

“From a writing point of view, I was impressed with their motivation, all of my writers, even the poorest were fully engaged. I used the job application as a piece of formal assessed writing for this term and I can honestly say it was the best standard of writing I've had at this stage in P6, across the board.”

“I feel more motivated to try out different styles and genres of writing with an engaging context.”

“I will definitely be using this approach every year in my teaching career!”

“Pupil motivation, enthusiasm and success rates have increased dramatically.”

“This approach has been particularly effective in motivating some disengaged boys.”

**Further reading and resources:**

A range of worked through examples, including full resources to support a Storyline topic on The Visitor Centre, can be found at ABLE2, Argyll and Bute’s literacy website: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/able/>

Steve Bell & Sallie Harkness: Storyline – Promoting Language across the Curriculum, UKLA

Carol Omand: Storyline: Creative Learning across the Curriculum, UKLA

Carol Omand: Storyline: Developing Effective Questioning

Appendix 1

**Incidents planning grid**

 INCIDENTS

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Type of writing |  | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. |
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