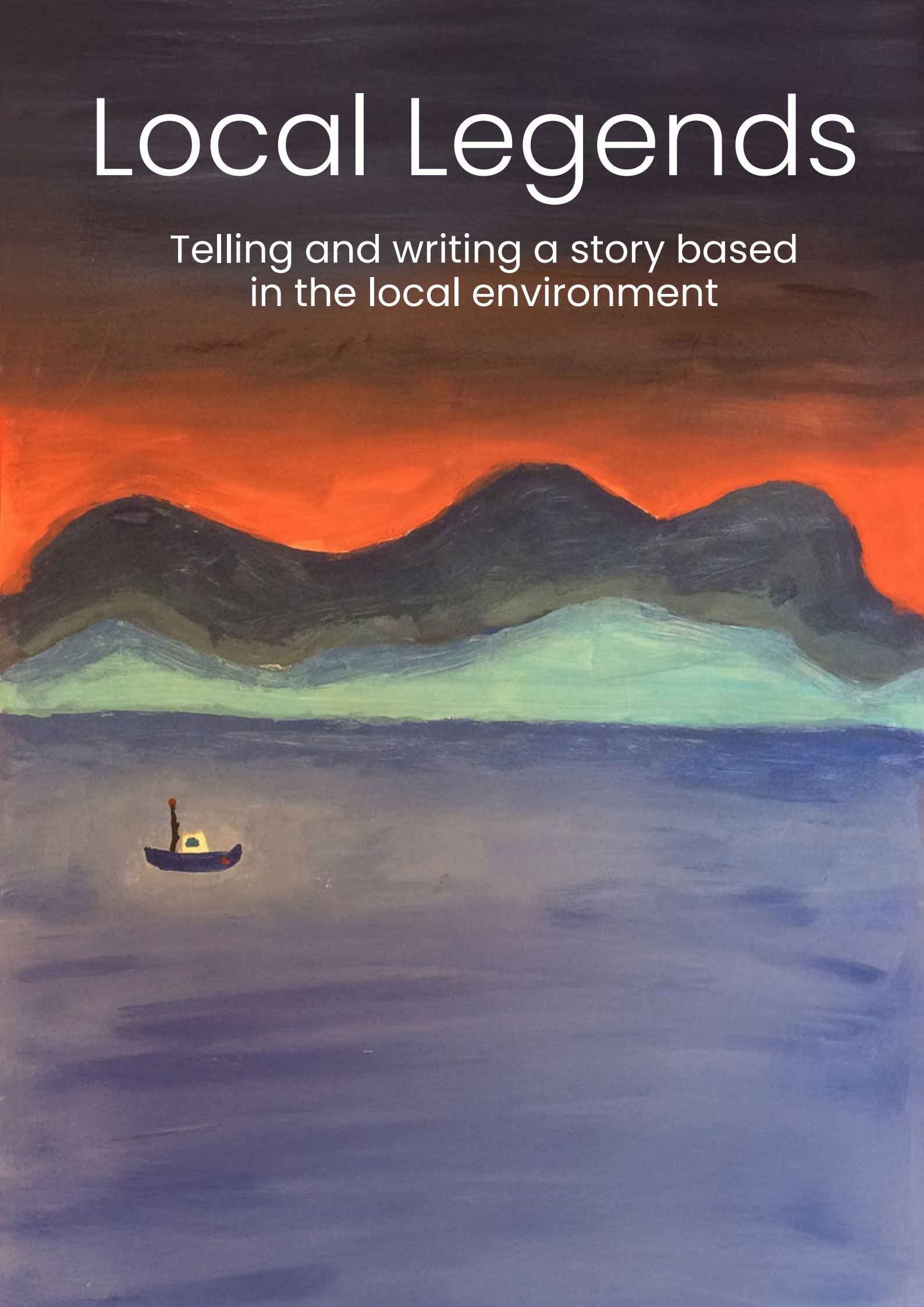
Local Legends

Telling and writing a story based in the local environment



The Morecambe Bay Curriculum Storytelling and Writing Pilot Project

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the schools and teachers involved in the Storytelling Project, which was supported by the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Lancaster University.

Y5 - Carter's Charity Primary School and Leana Spence

Y3 – The Cathedral Catholic Primary School and Fiona Lowe

Y5 – Heysham St. Peter's CE Primary School and Hannah Owens Class

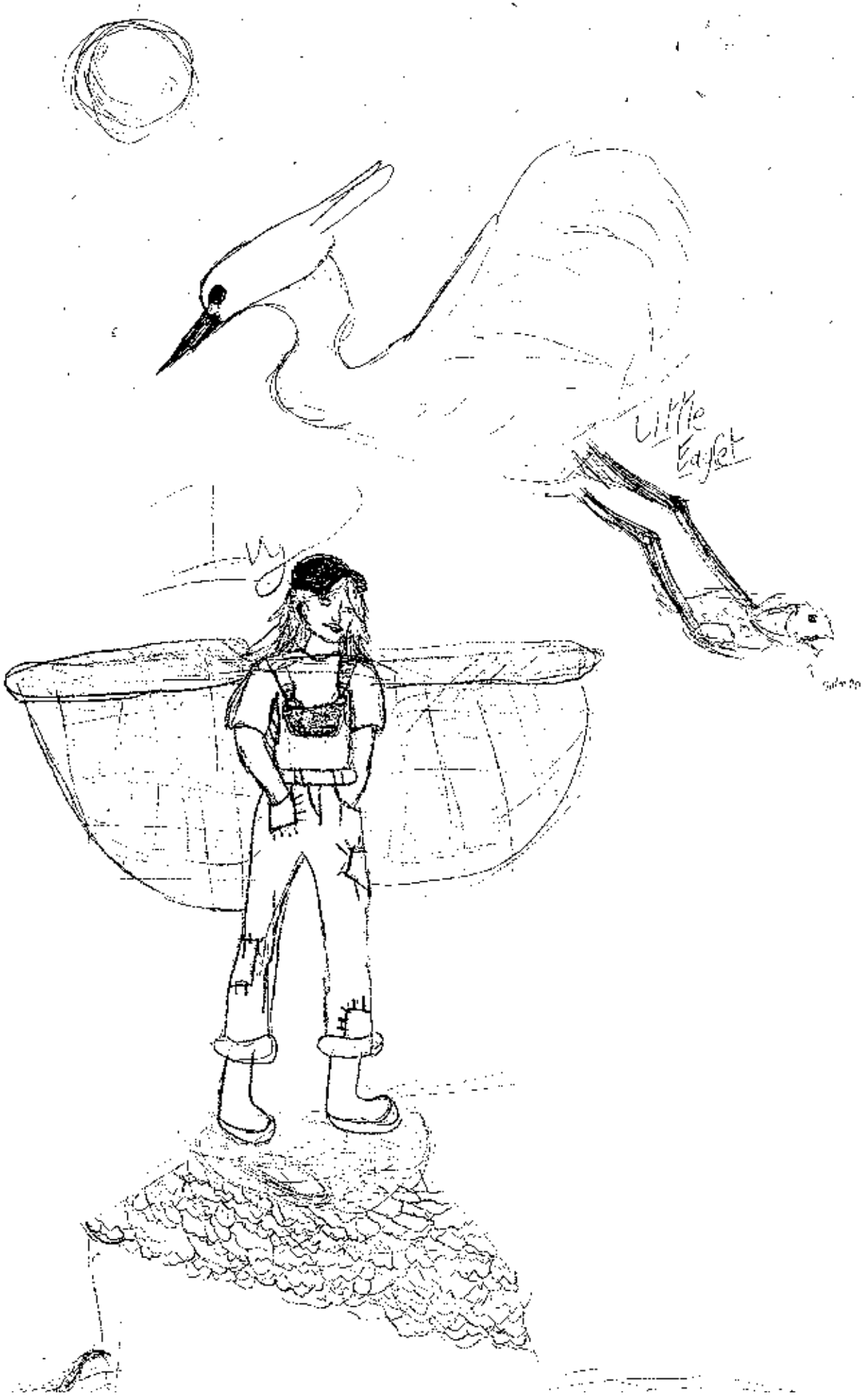
M2 - Morecambe Road School and Kristian Davies

Y5/6 - Overton St. Helen's CE Primary School and Emma Ingham

Y3/4 - Quernmore CE Primary School and Rachel Stevenson

Y6 - Ryelands Community Primary School and Sophie Sanders and Linda Pye

Contents


Little
Egret

Introduction

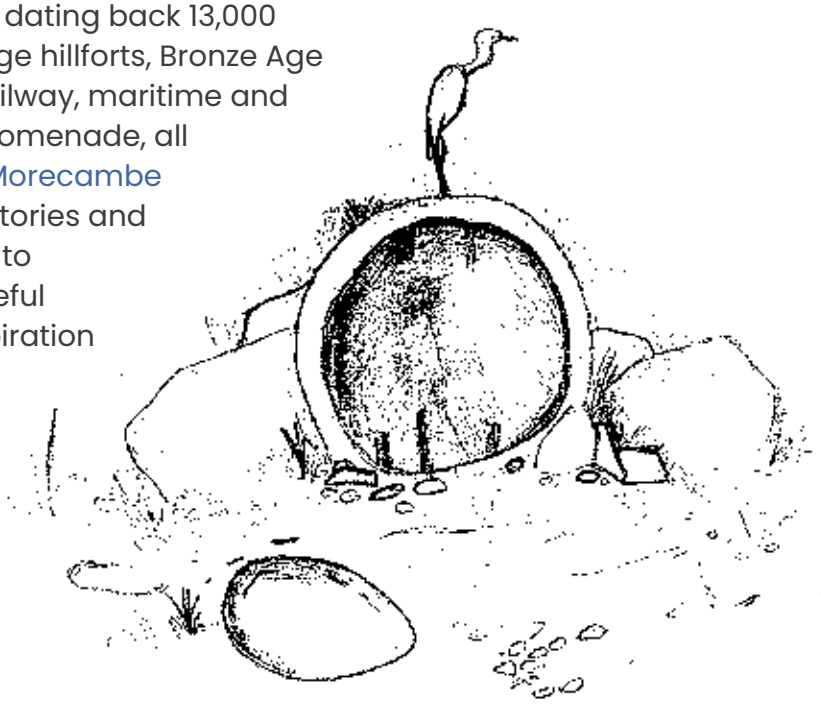
This curriculum resource draws on the experiences and insights of the Morecambe Bay Storytelling and Writing Project. In this project (2025), groups of children in seven schools (six primary and one specialist school) created a story based on local facts, events or settings. The seven stories were illustrated and published as 'Local Legends. A Morecambe Bay Anthology'. This resource supports teachers to develop their own storytelling sessions.

Specialist knowledge for teachers

Storytelling helps us make sense of the world

Sharing stories is 'central to humankind' (Bland, 2015) and it is through narrative that we make sense of the world around us (Hibbin, 2016). Engaging with stories not only enhances communication and language skills, it can improve pupils' personal, social and emotional development and their cultural understanding of the society in which they live (Dubiel, 2024). Focusing on local stories is crucial for building pupils' relationship with place and supports them in making connections with the people of their community. These stories would be told time and again, being passed through the generations, and so would shift with the telling. The stories are therefore real living things that belong to the people who tell them… and the people who hear them.

In Morecambe Bay, there is a rich history of heritage and storytelling, which draws on archaeological evidence dating back 13,000 years. Around the Bay you can find Iron Age hillforts, Bronze Age stone circles, Viking graves, a Victorian railway, maritime and fishing traditions and a British seafront promenade, all of which have stories attached to them. Morecambe Bay Partnership are keen to share these stories and images and there is a website dedicated to Recording Morecambe Bay. These are useful sources of information when seeking inspiration for your own local stories.



Connecting oral and written stories

When teaching, it is important to recognise the differences between oral stories and written stories, to understand how best to support each process. Both are valuable and can be used to explain, entertain and teach others. This works well when one process feeds into the other, for example, ideas can be tested out verbally before being finalised for a written text. Oral storytelling can therefore serve as a good motivator for children when it comes to writing. If they have already acted out and invested in the story, even those who may be reluctant writers can be more engaged. The preparatory work gives them confidence to know what to say/write and they will have already seen some of their ideas come to life.

For oral stories, the value comes in the fluidity of the story, which can change, evolve and be shaped collaboratively. They are highly interactive, as feedback from the audience is immediate and pupils can assess whether their ideas make sense by testing them out aloud. They also offer many performative and dramatic opportunities, portraying stories individually or in groups through improvisations, planned performances or freeze frames.

Providing these spaces for children to develop confidence with speaking is very important but requires careful scaffolding to support those who may initially struggle. It is important to create a safe space in which they have the chance to test out ideas freely, sharing when they feel comfortable and starting to build positive self-belief through small steps and a scaffolded approach. Having the chance to speak in front of others and gain confidence is a positive impact in itself and should not be under-estimated.

For written stories, the text requires more thought and planning, particularly with regards to structure. The children need to work out the narrative threads and plan how things fit together. Through the process of shared writing, they also have the chance to engage with the story through multiple media. They may test out ideas orally, rehearsing sections of dialogue, or they may start by drawing an illustration of the scene before writing key sections e.g. dialogue between characters or a description of the setting. In this way, as the teacher, you can bring together the strengths of different individuals and all children can contribute in their own ways to the construction of the story. As the process progresses, they have the chance to edit, revise and refine the product before sharing, meaning there may be multiple drafts feeding into the final product. These too can be tested out orally and illustrations can be added. It is important to support pupils by encouraging use of literary devices in their writing, including the use of adverbs and adverbials to provide details about when, where and how events took place, which helps to ensure all the parts of the story fit together.

The writing process involves a complex integration of skills, including handwriting, spelling, grammar and punctuation, awareness of purpose and audience, organisation of ideas, choice of language for effect as well as the story itself (which has another set of components such as characters, setting, plot etc). Oral rehearsal helps with limiting this cognitive load. If the story is already developed, orally edited and well-composed, this allows pupils to focus on the transcriptional element of writing, thus helping to reduce overall cognitive load.

Historical stories

History is a great source of inspiration for local stories. If pupils are engaged in writing historical stories, they need to consider the opportunities and restrictions this confers, ensuring they present an authentic portrayal of their chosen time, even if the story itself is fictional. This requires them to question what would be appropriate in terms of clothing, technology, employment, housing, transport etc. However, telling historical stories can still involve imagination and there is scope for creative licence!

There are several ways in which you can support pupils with developing historical stories and the following table provides some suggestions:

Structure	Language Features	Writers' Tips
• The narrative is about something that has already happened in the past, so a series of events is usually the underlying structure. • The teller/writer can adapt the structure to achieve a specific effect, for example, the story can begin with a main character looking back and reflecting on the past (I was just a lad then. Let me tell you what happened…) • Sometimes a historical narrative begins with the final event and then goes on to explain what led up to that by moving back in time to tell the whole story. • Historical fiction requires a historical setting but can also be an adventure or a mystery.	• Historical settings need detail to make them authentic and to give important 'mapping' clues to the reader. When was this happening? Where is the story taking place? Make sure you use the appropriate language of the time e.g. coins (rather than money), garments or clothing (rather than clothes), timepiece (rather than watch). • Include appropriate archaic language and old-fashioned words which may have fallen out of usage e.g. Let me carry thy basket, old dame. • It can also include some models of sentence grammar no longer commonly or informally used e.g. That which thee seek thou shalt find in the forest.	• Include accurate historical detail to create the setting (The winter of 1509 was bitterly cold and many poor country folk were starving) or let the reader work it out (The young prince had just been crowned Henry VIII when a country boy called Tom arrived in London). • Use the right kind of old-fashioned language when characters speak to one another. • Description is important for the setting and the characters but you can add historical details in different ways to give variety: ■ Description: The little girl was wearing a long cloak and woollen hood. ■ Action: He threw his sword to the floor and rushed down the stone spiral staircase. ■ Dialogue: 'Wait! I'll get a candle to light the way out.'
Source: The National Strategies (Primary Support for Writing, Fiction)		

Who is the audience?

Writing for an audience is motivating and can help with maintaining a focus. A major boost in the children's enthusiasm for working on a shared story is knowing that it will be shared with others and, preferably, will be published. Funding permitting, an online or printed publication, a small booklet for example, can later be shared with the community, with parents and in the school. This can enhance the children's pride and ownership of their story. In the Morecambe Bay Curriculum Storytelling and Writing project, the children knew that their writing and drawing would be published in a book (Local Legends). They talked enthusiastically about becoming 'published' writers and this knowledge helped in some of the difficult moments, when ideas were lacking or concentration waning. Having a product also means it can be used as curriculum resource for further oracy and literacy related lessons and learning activities.

Use storytelling across the curriculum

Stories do not solely connect with historical or literary knowledge and can link to other curriculum areas. Geography is a good example, since children can draw upon the physical and social features of the land to set the scene for their tale. There can also be curriculum links to the creative arts, for example, children can illustrate their stories (and in the process learn about specific artistic techniques or work with new materials), create scenery for performances or compose music to accompany them. By delivering this as a whole class activity, there are opportunities to draw on different strengths and ensure pupils feel confident and capable with the tasks they have been given.

Curriculum aims

At MBC, we follow the Head, Heart, Hands pedagogical model, which ensures children develop: knowledge (head), values (heart) and skills (hands). It is important to keep all three in mind when planning experiences.

Head

Storytelling can provide a wealth of knowledge, as children learn about the past, historical events and their local areas through stories and legends. Depending on the topic, pupils could develop: historical knowledge relating to buildings or spaces in the community and near the school; geographical facts and knowledge related to the features of landscape; vocabulary and terminology relevant to the context; an awareness of changes over time and its environmental impacts. They also have the chance to develop knowledge of key literary devices such as adverbs and adverbials, metaphors and similes, and expressive language.

Heart

Storytelling helps to build emotional connection with the local environment and community. Understanding the history of a place through its stories helps to develop personal relationships and affiliations between the child, their local community and their environment. When telling or acting out stories, students empathise with the characters and consider their emotions at various points, thinking about how to portray these to others. Issues such as conflict resolution can also prompt empathy and sympathy. Acting, facial expressions, movement and freeze frames can all be used to support children in developing imagination and embodying the emotional connection with the characters, the story and where it is located.

Hands

The process of taking and applying what pupils have learned to create a story allows for their knowledge to be put into action. As part of this process, pupils can engage in hands-on drama activities such as oral storytelling, acting, communicating and listening to others. This allows for an embodied experience of the historical context, as children experience first-hand how people at the time would have spoken, what they would have done and how they would have behaved. The group-level process and pupil-led research encourages collaboration and teamwork towards a common goal. If they go out into their local area to speak to people and experience places and landscapes, this develops the children as active members of their local communities.

National Curriculum links:

Although storytelling has not always been granted a high status within the curriculum, it is now recognised that there should be a greater focus on supporting children's oral development and spoken language, which provides the foundation for their reading, writing and vocabulary development (OFSTED, 2024). The National Literacy Trust, who advocate for the teaching of oracy as a way of addressing the attainment gap, define this as 'the range of skills and techniques used to express thoughts verbally, including how well we listen, understand and can respond'. By teaching this explicitly, we can support children to be able to 'articulate their ideas, opinions and understanding to others in a clear and compelling manner'. Further information on oracy can be found in Voice 21's oracy frameworks, which include child-friendly prompts to help support the four dimensions of oracy: physical (voice and body language), linguistic (vocabulary, language and rhetorical techniques), cognitive (context, structure and reasoning) and social and emotional (collaborating with others, confidence and audience awareness). Oracy has also been highlighted as a priority in the Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025).

The following are just some of the National Curriculum objectives which could link to storytelling, but this is not an exhaustive list and the flexibility of storytelling means many more connections can be made.

Spoken language Years 1-6:

Pupils should be taught to:

- listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings
- maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments
- gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)
- select and use appropriate registers for effective communication

Writing composition Key Stage 1:

- Develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by creating narratives about personal experiences and those of others or writing about real events
- Consider what they are going to write by planning or saying this out loud
- Make simple additions or revisions by re-reading their writing to check it makes sense
- Read aloud what they have written with appropriate intonation to make the meaning clear

Lower Key Stage 2 writing composition:

- Plan their writing by discussing and recording ideas
- Draft and write by rehearsing orally, organising paragraphs around a theme, creating narrative, characters and plot, and using simple organisational devices
- Evaluation and edit by checking effectiveness and proposing changes
- Proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors
- Read aloud their own writing, to a group or the whole class, using appropriate intonation and controlling the tone and volume so that the meaning is clear

Upper Key Stage 2 writing composition:

- Plan their writing by considering audience and purpose, researching ideas and drawing on story conventions
- Draft and write by selecting appropriate vocabulary, describing settings, characters and atmospheres, and using a range of literary devices for cohesion, effect, organisation and presentation
- Evaluate and edit by assessing the effectiveness, proposing changes, ensuring consistency of tense and checking grammar
- Proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors

The Lancashire English Team have produced a Key Learning in Spoken Language resource which supports teachers to plan opportunities to develop oracy/spoken language, both in English lessons and across the curriculum.

Lesson activities in practice

Writing a story with your class: tips for managing and organising such a project

A storytelling project or unit can be done with the entire class or, if the school's organisational structure and curriculum allows this, with a smaller group of children. This could be a group of high attaining children; children who lack motivation and struggle with longer pieces of writing; or children who would benefit from activities that develop their speaking confidence and abilities.

The unit can be adapted for Key Stage 1 or 2, or extended into Key Stage 3. The Morecambe Bay Curriculum Storytelling and Writing Project included years 3, 4, 5, 6 and a special school but it could work equally well across any primary stage or into Years 7-8.

Before you start, think about:

- How the project can link to your school and class curriculum for the year.
- What priority topics could be embedded in it.
- How your storytelling and writing project could support other areas of the curriculum (for example history, geography, art, etc.).

It might help to develop a timeline and schedule of activities, which includes four stages (see further details on these below):

1. Time for research
2. Time for deciding on a topic and creating a story line (story boarding)
3. Time for story telling activities
4. Time for writing: how many sessions and how long should these sessions be?

Keep in mind the specifics of your class group whilst planning, including their levels of literacy, vocabulary and confidence in spoken English.

Tips for working with a large group:

If you include an entire class, the aim is to produce one shared and co-written class story. In addition, each child can write their own version of the story.

Whole class writing can be challenging and might lead to many heated discussions about the plot and its characters, about which words and expressions to use and about whose ideas will become part of the chosen story. More confident and more vocal children may find it easier to have their voices and ideas heard and included at the expense of others who may feel left out and who might disengage from the process. Based on the experience of the pilot project, here are some tips for how to manage the process:

- When the research has been done (see next section) and the class has agreed on the theme or main idea of the story, brainstorming/mindmapping sessions in groups can be the first step towards identifying main characters and a storyline. You could produce a 'menu' of ideas, including:

Setting	Characters	Theme	Plot

- Groups can then share their ideas with the rest of the class; the next step is for the entire class to agree on the main storyline, characters and places/settings to include.
- It is best to develop the story in several steps, to be worked on across several lessons; to imagine an entire story in one session is difficult. A process that involves the children in imagining the story scene by scene is more likely to work; depending on the children's age, short sessions of story creation/discussion are likely to work best.
- These sessions could include the creation of a storyboard or story map (created with the whole class, using an interactive whiteboard or flipchart). This helps with the process of agreeing on the main plot, key scenes, settings and characters (see next section, Storytelling Activities, stage 2).

- When the storyboard has been agreed upon and finalized, small groups can work on 'filling out' individual scenes and dialogue. One way to do this is by dividing the class into groups according to core elements (scenes and dialogues) of the story and tasking each group with working on such a scene. In the Pilot project, teachers used different strategies for this. Some used freeze frames (stage 3) to help the children imagine and experience and visualise specific parts of the story. Then, when talking through the presented scene, ideas for description and dialogue will emerge (NB: somebody will need to take notes and/or you may want to record the discussion and use the transcript as notes).
- Moving from initial ideas to imagining a piece of dialogue, a scene or a setting can be difficult. There may be moments when the children lack imagination and few ideas are emerging; at other times there may be too many competing ideas and it will require a process of negotiation to agree on a shared idea. In the pilot project, at times the teacher acted as arbitrator and made the final choice (explaining to the children why they chose a specific idea and discarded others), at other times the children voted. However, it is important to discuss cohesion throughout the story, ensuring it 'flows' and that all the sections connect logically.
- Storytelling and drama activities are useful tools to fire up the children's imagination, to help them 'feel' (experience) the characters and imagine parts of the plot. These activities can help move the story forwards in a situation when the children are not sure what the detail of a scene should be, what the characters should say or what the next step in the narrative should be (see next section Storytelling Activities).
- Writing can be difficult and when faced with a blank sheet, asked to write a scene or describe a setting of their story, children may hesitate. Experimenting with group discussions (one child scribing) and with other text formats (for example post-its) might help. Post-its are easier for children because the space for writing is small and thus experienced as less daunting. The format is also seen as less permanent and easier to approach than an empty page in an exercise book or a large sheet of paper. Children who are concerned about taking risks, might find a post-it note easier to write on; using these notes helps introduce and familiarize the children with the idea of drafting and drafts (which need not be perfect, can be worked on or discarded). Post-its can then be arranged on a board to compare and complement ideas and the short snippets of writing they include. Sentence stems and words and phrases 'magpied' or 'borrowed' from similar style texts could also be used to scaffold the children's ideas and language choices.
- Most children enjoy drawing/painting; when tasking the children or a group of them with imagining a particular scene or setting of their story, it may help to invite them to both draw and write or to only draw and perhaps annotate their drawing.
- Illustrating the finished story is likely to be an important and motivating part of the activity for the children; different children can be tasked to create images for specific parts of the story. Choosing which child's image to use can be done with the whole class but may also need your, the teacher's arbitration.

Storytelling activities

The following lesson activities have been used by the schools and teachers involved in the pilot project. Although ordered 1-4, there may well be cross-over, for example the pupil activities in number 3 may support the development of the story board in number 2 and vice versa.

1. Research-related activities (to be adapted depending on children's age)

The first phase of the process is to conduct research into the topic area you want to explore, thinking about the setting of your story. This can involve:

- Online research (to be done by children independently or with teachers, depending on age), using, for example, local history and heritage website (https://www.recordingmorecambebay.org.uk/).
- Organise visits to places and buildings around the school and the local area to gather ideas for story settings and scenes. Take photographs or make sketches to refer to later.
- Read other stories with the class and look at illustrated books, for example, 'Made by the Moon' by Emily Hennessey. Depending on when and where your story is located, try to find texts from that period or stories placed in the same period, to help the children get a sense of the language used (so that they can use appropriate language in their own story) and to imagine details of, for example, how people were dressed or what houses looked like. These could be used as models or mentor texts and language could be collected (magpied) and adapted to be used in their own writing.
- Invite family and community members to the school to talk about local history and memories, to identify ideas for a story that is related to local events, myths and legends, places or geographical locations.
- Ask the children to interview family members (e.g. grandparents) about past events in the community or other memories related to the community and local landmarks that they might be able to share.

2. Deciding on a focus and initial storyboarding

Once the research is complete, you need to narrow this down to choose a specific topic. This will help you to start to map out the overall direction of the story itself which can be supported by the storytelling activities outlined in section 3 below.

The story is likely to follow a simple structure involving the characters encountering and resolving a problem of some kind. However, you don't need to create the whole story in one go and do this in small steps. You could have a whole lesson, for example, deciding on and experimenting with the characters.

A simple six-step model can be useful as a story map, for example by using a simplified version of the 6 phase plot structure proposed by Michael Huage:

1. The Set Up: Introduce the characters and set the scene	2. The new situation: What is the event or problem which complicates this?	3. Progress: What do they do to address the problem?
4. High stakes: What are the complications as the story progresses?	5. Final push: What are the consequences? Is there a dramatic high point?	6. The e nding: What is the conclusion of the story? What have we learnt?

3. Storytelling exercises and activities:

To develop the different parts of the story, you can embed some of the following activities:

- **The YES/NO game**: This is an easy game to help children experience and try out how to 'act' and speak using different emotions (in their voice, their facial expression, their posture and body position). In pairs, sitting opposite each other, the children have a conversation only using the words yes and no. One child is the yes sayer, the other consistently responding with a no; only a minute or less is needed for each pair to try out and experience different expressions: how to express insistence, hesitance, persuasion etc; how to use voice, facial expressions and body language to persuade or resist, to express certainty or uncertainty, to speak loudly or softly, to be gentle or fierce, etc. This will be most effective following modelling by adults.
- **The 'Show me your emotion' game**: This game is about using not just language but facial expressions, body posture and movement to express emotions – an important part of storytelling. You may want to model the activity first: imagine a specific emotion, for example anger, frustration, joy, hilarity and 'act' it (without using words), asking the children to guess which emotion you are showing. When the children have guessed a few examples of emotions, ask them to play the game in small groups or ask individual children to come to the front and act an emotion which the others need to guess.
- **In small groups, ask children to tell and/or act out parts of the story**: Give them time to practise before they present to the rest of the group; this activity allows you to support the children's confidence in storytelling but can also help with creating details of the story, if the group's acting practice also involves taking notes or if you record them while acting (you could precede such an activity with a short introduction into stories and storytelling - see above section on Specialist knowledge for teachers);
- **Invite a professional storyteller or education consultant to deliver a session on storytelling and stories**, e.g. Emily Hennessey, Anne O'Connor or Lancashire Professional Development Service. Or, you could invite people from the local community to present their own stories to the children.
- **Freeze Frames**: Ask the children to select an important event or scene in their story and use a freeze frame, or 'tableau'. This involves the children using their bodies to create a visual representation of a particular event in the story, and it helps them to imagine what happens in a particular scene and how different characters relate to one another. A good way to explain this is that you are pressing pause in the story – what will we see at this point? You can find further information here.
- R**ead/tell drafts** of the story to other children in the school to gain peer feedback and refine ideas. This enables the stories to be shared with children from other classes or ages and will enable them to check that their ideas make sense. Can their audience follow the thread of the story? Do they enjoy it?

4. Story writing activities:

Once you have rehearsed and developed your story you can move onto the writing.

- For younger children or any child who finds extended writing challenging, this activity is useful: Choose a key scene of the story and invite the children to draw that scene, using colours and materials of their choice; children can add labels or short text (annotations, speech bubbles) to their scene. Invite children to 'tell' their depicted scene, take notes/scribe and use this writing to feed into the shared story (or for the child's individual story).
- If the class has produced a story map (stage 2), you can use that map to 'assign' specific scenes and dialogues to small groups, tasking them with adding detail; or, you can use the story map to talk through the story with the whole class, asking children to put their hand up if they have a good bit to add (a bit of speech or a description). Add these to the developing story (using a whiteboard or flipchart).

As mentioned above, the writing process is complex and involves a deeper understanding of grammatical tools and literary techniques. For further information and support on this, you can find a set of resources on the MBC Moodle. These can be accessed through the Resources page of the MBC website – simply look for the Local Legends section.

Adaptations (also depending on age group)

Children at the 'early stages' of writing:

- Images to support writing
- Sentence stems and word mats
- Recording devices to support memory – think of a sentence, say it, repeat it, write it, check it.
- Extra modelling by adults using whiteboards but not for children to copy. Even if the children are writing emergently, this is going to develop them more as writers than 'copy' writing.
- If children are still reluctant to write, you could try a 'cloze' process where the child orally composes the sentence, the adult writes part of the sentence and the child writes the other part, gradually withdraw the amount being written by the adult.

Children ready for stretch and challenge:

- Use the table on page 10 which provides structure, language features and writer's tips and work on elements of these. Are they in place? Are the consistent? Does the writer use these strategies to 'show not tell'?
- Inclusion of all the elements of a 'good' story (see the additional Moodle resources).

Working with technology:

- Use digital media, e.g. Green screen. One of the schools in the MBC project used photographs of children staging/acting parts of the story.
- There are many digital story writing apps/multimedia software which could help with story creation and writing.
- Video and audio recording can be used to share stories, to help with the editing process or to produce short films to share with the wider school community.

Share your stories with us!

At MBC we are keen to promote your work on local legends. Share your stories and photos of your class's work and activities with us via: mbc@lancaster.ac.uk with the title Local Legends.

Lancaster University

This resource was prepared by Uta Papen, Bethan Garrett and Steph Johnson, with additional contributions drawn from the work of Anne O'Connor and Emily Hennessy.