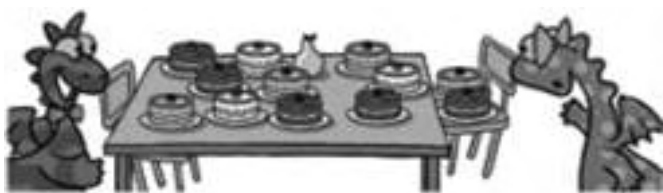


Game -drills

A game-drill is a very simple way of doing a repetition drill to make it thought-provoking (head), physical (hands) and adrenaline-producing (heart). Now I know drills are not cool these days: every time I ask a group of teachers 'How many of you use repetition drills?' I get a very lukewarm response. But I think learners (and not just highly auditory learners) can benefit a lot from drills – I certainly have in my own language-learning past. And drills don't have to be boring and mechanical.

All you need is a picture to make statements about, using a particular structure. Any picture will do, as long as everybody can see it clearly: a small picture in their course book or a large picture held up or projected. Any structure will do, as long as it ties in with your picture.

Here's my picture. The structure we're practising is *There's...* and *There are...*



Here's what I do. I make true or false statements about the picture.

If what I say is *true*, then the students must immediately nod their heads, say 'Yes!' and repeat the statement.

If what I say is *false*, then the students must immediately shake their heads and say 'No! That's not true!'

Even though this particular drill forces the students to count, it's important to insist on a reasonably fast response to get the adrenaline flowing (though it's a good idea to give them some time to look at the picture before you start.). I also insist on a wholehearted response

rather than a tentative one and get them to practise this. What happens when they get it wrong sometimes (as they inevitably do)? Everyone bursts out laughing.

The drill for the picture above would go something like this (and because it's lots of fun, it could go on for a whole lot longer than indicated here):

T: There are ten cakes on the table.
Ss: (nodding) Yes! There are ten cakes on the table.
T: There are two cakes on the chair.
Ss: (nodding) Yes! There are two cakes on the chair.
T: There's a pear on the chair.
Ss: (shaking..) No! That's not true.
T: There are five pink cakes.
Ss: (shaking..) No! That's not true..... (and so on.)

In case you're wondering why the students aren't asked to correct the false statements instead of just to say 'No! That's not true!' well they are sometimes. But in this instance there are several ways of correcting, so it could all get a bit ragged, as well as slow the pace down considerably. I find too that students enjoy shouting out 'No! That's not true!' and do so with great gusto! After all, it's not often that they get to say such things in the classroom!

Our mind is reflective, our body is active and our emotions are affective. These three things together make for learning which is highly effective. Head, hands and heart.

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Picturebooks and creativity: an interview with Nick Sharratt

Janet Enever



Janet Enever talks with best-selling children's author and illustrator, Nick Sharratt, about books, children and creativity.

JE: Can I ask you to explain where you start when you're creating a new book?

NS: Well, there are two ways that I start a book. One is, if I'm given a problem to solve by a publisher, which might be something like a specific theme, a novelty device or an unusual format to exploit. For example, I was given a book made of tracing paper and asked, what can you come up with from this? Instantly, the semi-opaque quality of the paper got me very excited and I thought "fog" - and that was my starting point. Sometimes I'm given a specific requirement and I find it really helps me.

For example, with the book *Shark in the Park* I was told it had to be a Big Book, it had to have a novelty aspect, an educational aspect, a rhyming text and be aimed at 4-5 year olds. This was great. It really stimulated me and I came up with 'Shark in the Park' which fulfilled all those criteria and is also, I think, quite a successful little story in itself.

JE: *It's a superb title, I really like it.*

NS: When I go into schools the children always say triumphantly and unprompted, "It rhymes!" So, that's a good start. The rhyming is very important and, in this case, the title *Shark in the Park* came before the actual story. I'd wanted to do something about sharks because when I ask children what jobs they'd like to do one day, there's always one child who wants to be a marine biologist and they're all very keen on sharks.

Sometimes I'm given problems to solve, which is great for me. I find it tougher, though ultimately very satisfying, to come up with my own ideas from scratch. I'll have general themes in my head like 'pirates' or 'treasure' but no sure ways about how to exploit them until I've tried out different approaches, rejecting them one by one until I find the perfect idea. In fact, treasure is one of those ideas floating in my brain at the moment. It's been stored away for a couple of years now, but I still haven't come up with a way to really exploit it yet.

The stimulus for the treasure theme was going into schools and reading a book called *Mrs Pirate*. Whenever we get to the page with the treasure, there's always an intake of breath - the children just *adore* treasure and I keep noticing this. Here's the story:

"When Mrs Pirate goes shopping... she buys an apple pie and a patch for her eye, a bar of soap and a telescope," and so on. Then "she buys some knickers and a vest and an old treasure chest". Whenever I'm working with this book, children are always thrilled by the treasure and really interested in it. I usually draw the pictures on a flip pad as it's a really small book and they're always keen that I draw the chest properly, with a lock and a key. This idea is definitely on my list of things that I want to get out of my system.

JE: *Do you have in mind any sense of designing particular books for particular age groups when you write?*

NS: No, I don't really. I guess what I'm looking for with my picture books is that they will work with quite a wide age group. I use the books I've mentioned with children, right up to age 11. I think they enjoy them at a different level. For example, *Shark in the Park* works as a rhyming story; every time he thinks he sees a shark, it turns out to be something benign. Hopefully, that kind of surprise works. You don't know what it's going to be, then, the final picture is an image that amuses them (a man with an 'Elvis style' quiff of hair which points upwards - resembling the fin of a shark). They like the Elvis Presley picture. They're 'in' on the joke of the quiff. Hopefully, there's a slightly more grown-up sense of humour that goes through the books if you want it, which helps to interest older children. It's there even in the 'Read Me' books which were originally marketed as Toddler Books for Sainsbury's supermarkets. But, I've actually had a lot of feedback from schools. One school in particular,

in Leeds - I go goosebumpy in thinking about it - but they got so much work out of it. They were 6-7 year olds with quite a lot of reading problems, and they did a most fantastic assembly using all these stories. They made up their own versions, continuing the really simple rhymes, as in the book *Smart Aunties* with, for example, "Aunty Molly had a brolly". The children acted this out and added their own aunties and really pushed the story. So, it was fantastic! In fact, I think that using adult characters was quite good for extending the age range of the books a bit.

JE: *I'd like to ask about creativity. Have you had any unexpected responses from children?*

NS: The example I gave before of the assembly - that's the most exciting thing - when it goes beyond what I'd expected. It kind of ties in with my definition of creativity with a book. It's when it triggers something else and it can be anything. It can be just daydreaming or musing on the lives of the characters outside of the story, which is something I do a lot of the time, or it can be much more specific and ambitious than that such as making up your own rhyming stories and creating your own flap books, which I see a lot when I go into schools.

JE: *With a lot of your books you seem to work collaboratively with someone. How does that process work?*

NS: Well, it tends to be that I just get sent texts and am left to get on with it very freely. The writer usually knows my work already, so they know they're not going to get any pastel shades and - well, the black line is very important. I've almost never done a book without it. I really am hooked on drawing a black line. It goes back to how I drew as a child. I was a great user of black felt-tipped pens, always drawing with a black felt-tipped pen and then colouring in the drawing, and it kind of ties in with doing cartoons and comic strips. Also, the (19)60's graphic images which I really loved as a child - the very clean, bold images that tended to have a black line to them.

JE: *So you work by doing line drawings in pen first?*

NS: I do pencil 'roughs' and I just keep on re-drawing the roughs, re-drawing, re-drawing until I get a pretty finished rough which I send to the publisher. It's the line that I'm hooked on - the process I love most is doing the line drawings. Working on it and getting to my final rough. Then, when it comes to the artwork, I like drawing the black line. Colouring is not my favourite thing.

JE: *I'm astonished at that. There's so much colour in your work, I assumed that would be the overriding element for you.*

NS: It doesn't give me the same satisfaction as thinking about getting the character and drawing the line. It's also quite arduous getting the colours to balance throughout the book. When I'm drawing I feel I'm having more fun, when it's just me and a pencil, but when it comes to the colour, there are so many other decisions that have got to be taken into account, that it can become quite complex. The thing about the drawing is that sometimes you go back to the joy of drawing as a child. You're thinking: "Oh, I wonder what this character will be having

for tea or what kind of house they live in". It's that really nice strand of creativity, whereas when I'm colouring, I'm being very objective and just thinking this grey has got to be light enough to work with the blue. It is creative, but there's not the same kind of fantasy element. As a child I loved Heath Robinson's drawings. The lines are all just *right*. It tells you precisely, you can decipher it completely. It's very direct, just using the black line - its so, so expressive.

JE: *Are you conscious of any elements of your work that seem to particularly appeal to boys?*

NS: I try to make my books appeal to both sexes. I do think about that because a lot of the characters are girl characters, like Daisy in *Eat your Peas* is a female character. I've just been working on a "Daisy" book called *Hello, Six and a Half* in which Daisy becomes a spy. In fact, I've had to think a lot about how to make it balanced. She gets involved in James Bond type things. Recently, I've been trying to make some decisions about objects that I'm using on the end papers (the inside front and back covers). In the story she uses a hairdryer as a zap gun, a perfume bottle as invisible ink, a hairbrush as a secret telephone. When you know the story, they all make sense, but I thought, I can't use these on the end papers because it makes it look too feminine; on the other hand, I can't use the helicopter and some of the other James Bond images because then it'll look too masculine. So, in the end, I've just used a repeat silhouette of Daisy that seems to have the right neutrality. That seemed to be mid-way! Similarly with colour, it really does boil down to the pink and blue thing a lot. I love pink and I use it a lot, but I do get discouraged by publishers from using too much on covers, although, *Ketchup on your Cornflakes?* has a bright pink cover, and has been very successful with both sexes. As far as I'm aware, it's never put off boys from reading it. It's now going to have a blue cover in a new edition, so it'll be interesting to see if it suddenly makes a noticeable difference. But I think that what balances my use of pink here is the strong black line. The black line is something which maybe makes it less feminine. I think that using the black line helps my illustrations work for boys. There's definitely a sort of nod to comics and action strips as well, also in the lettering. I nearly always do the lettering on the covers and I think that ties in with comic strips too. A lot of my work is described as 'cartoony' which I don't mind. I think 'cartoon' is okay with boys, it doesn't put them off.

JE: *What about your choice of storyline - the risk-taking in your language seems to provoke so many possibilities - do you see this as a part of your style?*

NS: You mean, the sort of anarchy?

JE: Yes, in a sense.

NS: Well, I suppose with the flap books I've done, for example, *A Cheese and Tomato Spider* and *Don't Put Your Finger In the Jelly, Nelly!*, the key is the potential anarchy. I loved doing a book called *Once upon a Time*, where you mix up the elements of the pictures so the princess can dream about marrying a prince, if you like, or she can dream about marrying a clown,

a computer, a duck, a caravan etc.. I suppose I really like the books where you can be completely crazy if you want to - anarchic - where you're in control of it and you can do what you like with it. With the book, *Pirate Pete* for example, the child I'd love to share it with would be the one who took a picture from one page and put it at the front - to mix the whole thing up completely! That's what you're supposed to do, to take all the objects and really mix them up. The risk-taking books are risky in the sense that the children might not actually 'get it'. The risk is that they will just understand it conventionally. But, in my experience, they seem to be quickly 'in' on the joke and that seems to give them a certain pleasure in that they're in control of it and can play around with it. With these books you don't even have to read them from the front of the book only. You can work from the back to the front if you want- there's no restriction at all and that helps create a feeling of being in control.

JE: *Time (and space!) seems to be disappearing. So, one final question. Can I ask what creativity means to you? Can you possibly sum it up?*

NS: For me, I think it's when a book is a catalyst for the child thinking and discovering other things beyond the straightforward reading of the book, where the child's imagination or curiosity is really worked.

JE: *Thank you Nick for talking about your work so - creatively!*

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