More than words 2
Creating stories on page and screen

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

From their earliest years children are surrounded by texts that combine images and words, on screen and on paper, in the home, in the street and in school. This means that they bring a wide experience of texts to their school work, expecting to read images as well as print and, increasingly, expecting to use computers in seeking information. When they come to express ideas in classroom work, children readily draw on their experience to create multimodal texts using words, diagrams and pictures.

This research project aimed to look systematically at some of this work, specifically, narrative multimodal texts on paper and on screen as well as screen-based non-fiction texts. It follows the research report *More than words: multimodal texts in the classroom* (QCA/05/1290), which showed how the QCA writing assessment focuses could be usefully applied to non-fiction texts. The report concluded that there was scope for further application of the writing assessment focuses to multimodal narrative texts and to texts generated by digital technology.

In 2005 QCA funded further research by the UKLA into multimodal texts. We began by asking if the writing assessment focuses can be used equally effectively to describe:

● narrative multimodal texts

● narrative and non-narrative computer-generated texts.

Since at key stage 2 the focuses are combined into strands, the research team decided to use the writing assessment strands as a starting point for looking at multimodal texts. The work described in this booklet has been analysed according to the strands:

● composition and effect

● text structure and organisation

● sentence structure and punctuation, as well as spelling.

However, since the research was looking at how the strands could be applied to describe the features of multimodal texts that included writing and pictures, it was not appropriate to use the associated mark schemes to evaluate the texts.

This booklet presents a small number of paper-based and screen-based texts from foundation stage to year 6 to help readers appreciate how images and words integrate to contribute to communication. There were 25 teachers involved in the work from Barnsley, Croydon, Essex and Rugby. This booklet shows some of their work and represents their thinking as they researched making multimodal texts with their classes.

Using this booklet

The materials in this booklet might be used by teachers and schools to:

● reach an understanding of how the writing assessment strands might be used to describe the features of children's narrative texts that use image plus writing

● find ways of describing the features of texts that combine word, image and design on screen

- consider how the spoken word adds to onscreen presentations

- build on the information gained to teach reading and writing multimodal texts on screen and on paper.

Within a school, teachers could discuss a coordinated approach to describing the features of texts that combine image, layout and writing to represent ideas, considering:

- the effect of the piece and the role played in composition by image, design and words

- the use of image, design and words to structure and organise the text

- how layout and typography contribute to the punctuation of the text

- the choices made about appropriate syntax for the written parts of the text

- the role played by the spoken, sound and moving elements in children's multimodal texts.

The staff as a whole could discuss what 'getting better at multimodal representation' might look like, discussing:

- the choices children make about the balance of image and written text

- the use of space and layout on the page and screen

- evidence of children's use of models of multimodal texts encountered both at home and at school.

The staff as a whole or teachers who plan together might consider developing and responding to multimodal texts by:

- increasing the use of multimodal texts of all kinds, both as resources and models and as outcomes of learning

- offering opportunities for discussing with children the range of multimodal texts and their uses for communication

- planning to teach design, layout and effects of multimodal texts

- discussing assessment of screen-based multimodal texts that are accompanied by a spoken presentation.

In discussing specific texts with children, teachers might ask:

- how did you decide to use images or pictures for part of the story and words for the other part of the story?

- how did you decide about page or screen layout?

- for onscreen presentations, how did you decide what you would put on the screen and what you would express using sound or a spoken presentation?

Defining and describing multimodal texts

The increasing number of texts that include words and images mean that there are difficulties about how to describe them. Many of these texts produced using digital technologies are categorised according to the medium of communication, for example:

● the computer – internet information and software presentations

● paper-based texts – picture books, magazines, novels, information books

● sound and visual media – radio, television, videos, CDs and DVDs.

Whatever the medium, texts are made up of different combinations of modes:

● writing or print, including typographical elements of font type, size and shape

● images – moving and still, diagrammatic or representational

● sound – spoken words and music

● gesture and movement.

The children's work in this booklet represents different combinations of word, image and design. It was presented both on paper and on screen, so for clarity we use the term 'multimodal' throughout.

Analysing multimodal narratives

Analysing multimodal narratives has proved more challenging than analysing non-fiction multimodal texts. This is partly related to the models available for teaching narrative. Many narratives are longer than persuasive, information or explanation texts used as models for teaching. When children are asked to produce multimodal narratives based on models of picture books or graphic novels, they are likely to produce lengthy texts that require analysis of several pages of word and images. When the stimulus is a known folk or fairy story, even very young children may well create lengthy multimodal narratives of several pages. This means that any analysis or response has to take into account elements of text cohesion that may not be part of teachers' everyday expectations for response to children's writing.

Any narrative has a number of interacting elements that combine to make the story effective. When analysing written or multimodal narrative texts, teachers have to take into account elements of narrative structure, action, characterisation, dialogue, setting and descriptive and atmospheric detail. In making multimodal texts children are involved in articulating all these narrative elements through images, words, layout and choices of design.

A year 1 class spent three weeks reading, singing, telling and then making picture books based on Michael Rosen's *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*. One child, Indira, wanted her layout to be different from everyone else's. On the first page she makes four boxes, detailing the action in sequence. She wants the reader to note the smoke from the motorbike showing that the rabbit was going fast and to see how the mice are bumped. The movement of the rabbit across the frames and the crash with the mice detailed in the drawings show a good sense of narrative. The written part of the page gives a crisp summary of the action but the pictures show a gusto and enjoyment of how *The mice are getting bopt on the head.*
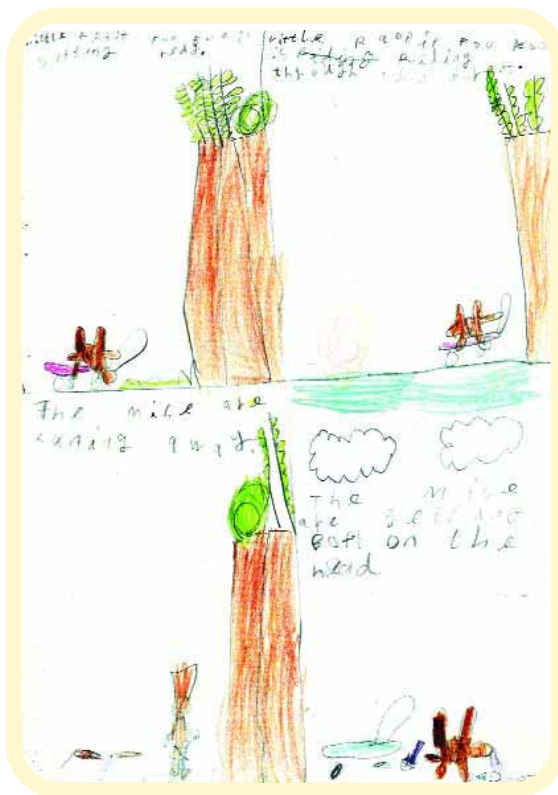
Figure 1 The first page of Indira's *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*
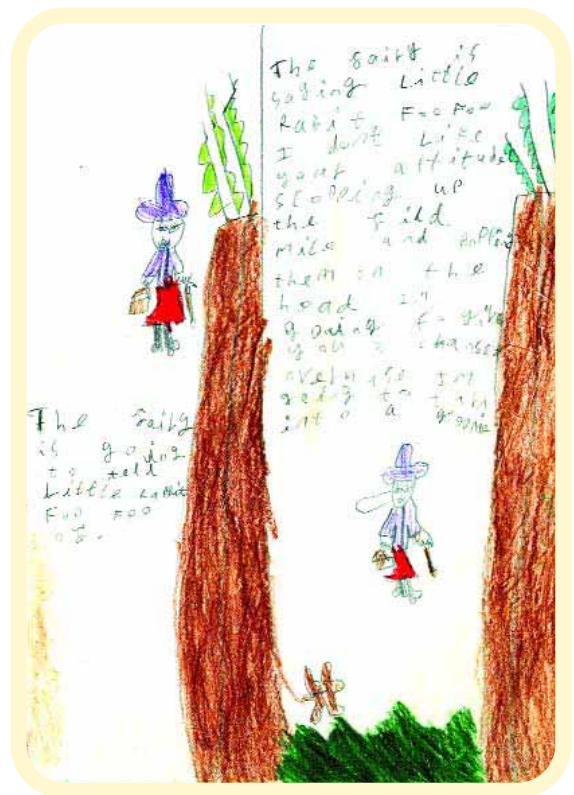
Figure 2 The second page of Indira's *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*

On the second page, wanting to show the movement of the Good Fairy down from the sky, Indira decides to cut the page in two to show the fairy's downward progress.

Indira's deliberate choice of layout and design – the placing of the words and pictures in the two frames – shows how even very young children can create complex extended multimodal narratives. In the left-hand frame she hints at what is to come once the fairy lands: *The fairy is going to tell Little Rabbit Foo Foo off*, and so she places the words under the descending fairy. In the right-hand frame Indira decides that if the words were below the fairy they would interfere with her smooth landing so she places them above the drawing: *The fairy is saying Little Rabbit Foo Foo I don't like your attitude scopping up the fild mice and bopping them on the head I'm going to give you 3 chanses overwise Im going to turn you into a goonie.*

Describing and assessing multimodal narratives

The teachers involved in the project, who worked to support and evaluate children's production of complex multimodal texts, were concerned about how to describe children's achievements in writing multimodal texts. When reading children's picture books, the teachers found it helpful to draw on their knowledge of how published picture books are constructed.

The teachers also noted difficulties about assessing children's narratives that were based on established stories in comparison with stories created from the child's own imagination. Such concerns about 'unscripted' and 'scripted' narratives apply equally to purely written texts.

If the teaching outcome is to be a sustained multimodal narrative, this has implications for teaching over a period of time. All multimodal narratives – screen-based or paper-based – take time to work on. The next section describes how teachers have found ways to teach multimodal texts.

Teaching multimodal texts

The teachers involved in the project used a broad range of texts to teach how different modes contribute to communication and exemplify effective communication. For the majority of teachers, the children's existing knowledge of picture books was the starting point for discussion. This was later expanded through the introduction of graphic novels, short animations, drama and ICT texts.

The teachers addressed design and layout, colour, font style and size in paper and screen-based texts and how they combine to make meaning. Including screen-based texts meant that sound and gesture were also explored as part of whole text design and cohesion. They discussed the way in which extended texts are designed as a whole, with ideas spanning multiple pages or screens. This contrasts with the findings of the previous research *More than words* in (QCA/05/1290) where non-fiction texts used in the classroom were often self-contained units on single pages or double-page spreads.

The teachers planned extended sequences of work. In teaching paper-based multimodal narrative texts, the models used were often quality picture books where the visual and verbal text complemented each other. These books were read, re-read, analysed and discussed at some length so that the children were immersed in the texts. At key stage 2 the teachers were careful to choose picture books that had content relevant to older readers and emphasised the visual as an essential part of the text. Where the outcome was a graphic novel, it was equally important to spend time analysing and discussing comic book narrative and design conventions since it could not be assumed that all children would be familiar with the text type.

When familiarising children with the text type, teachers modelled how to read a multimodal text, including attention to layout and the relationship between words, images and frames. Children needed to explore picture books on their own, returning to parts they found interesting, browsing backwards and forwards. This meant allowing time to explore and share the texts as well as time for talk and response with the whole class. Sometimes one double-page spread or one image would be worked on in depth. Drama, drawing and role play, supported by digital cameras, were used to explore the children's understanding of texts.

Writing narrative multimodal texts is a complex process. Each mode carries a different and often complementary part of the narrative. The teachers found that emphasising the balance of modes proved useful, for example at times the written text would give a minimum amount of narrative detail while the images provided more. Typically the teachers encouraged the children to design text in one mode then add a second mode, for example storyboarding before making a picture book. Teaching supported the integration of the different modes through a variety of digital and paper-based media. Teachers encouraged children to draw, photograph and debate their texts. Models of multimodal texts were revisited throughout the writing process.

Case study 1 Making the design process explicit

Drafts of graphic novels produced by Laura and Hannah (year 6) exemplify the structured planning process needed to produce multimodal narrative texts. A range of picture books and graphic novels were studied to identify the conventions of visual and written texts. The children's previous knowledge of film texts were used to enhance their understanding of paper-based multimodal texts. As part of the planning process for their own composition, the teacher asked the children to compile personal lists of key features. Figure 3 shows Hannah's *top tips for reading multimodal texts*. The learning outcome at the top of the page shows how the teacher makes explicit the intention of the lessons.

This in itself is a multimodal text, combining drawing and words to exemplify Hannah's understanding. At the bottom of the page she uses a word search format as an example of how image, characters, dialogue and facial expression interrelate. She also gives examples in speech and thought bubbles. The mirror image at the bottom right of the page shows a reflection of the word 'image' in water.

The children then moved on to look at framing in graphic novels. Figure 4 shows how the teacher has introduced the class to the concept of how frame size and shape influenced narrative pace.

The faces sketched at the top right show how the close-up shot is specifically designed to indicate character and emotion through facial expression. This is a concept they had met before when analysing film texts but in the graphic novel genre the expressions have been simplified to symbolic representations. The work at the bottom of the page shows the move from the concept of pace and visual representation of character to dialogue. The bullet points summarise what the children have learned.
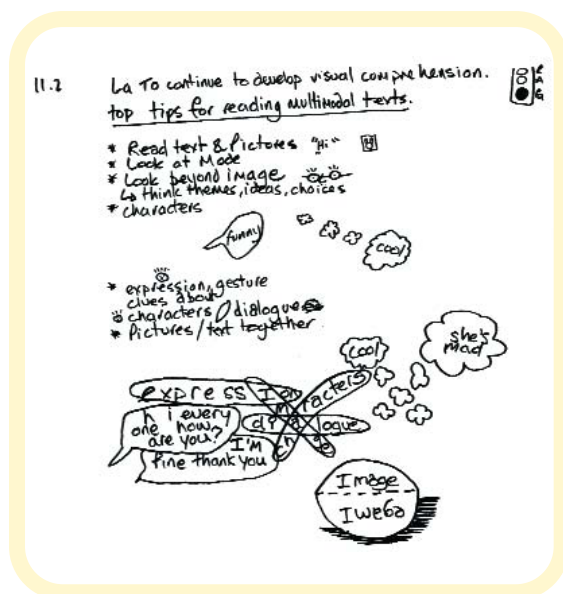
Figure 3 Hannah's top tips
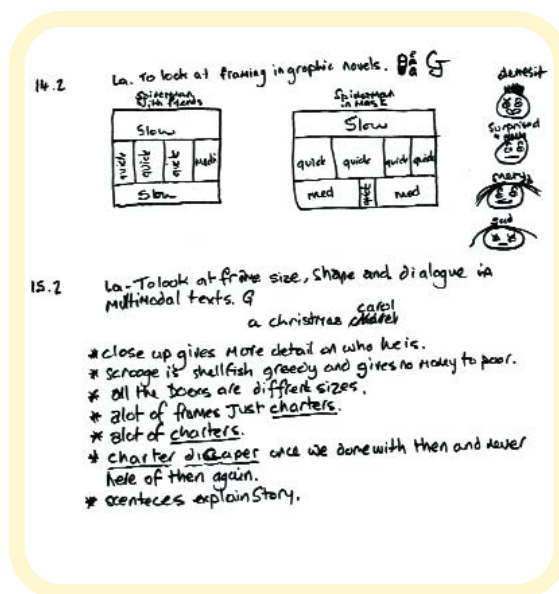
Figure 4 Hannah's draft of frame sizes
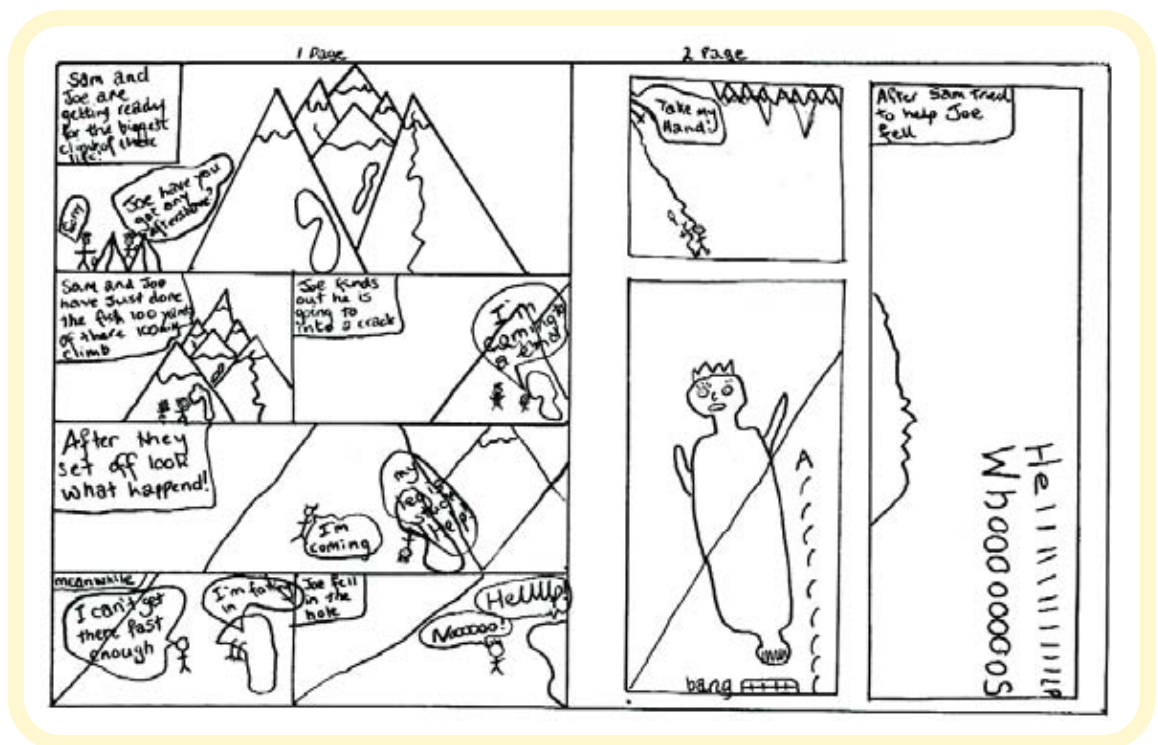
Figure 5 Two pages of Hannah's graphic novel

When interviewed after the sequence of lessons Hannah and Laura were explicit about what they had learned. They understood the stylistic devices used to create visual and written narratives, listing the key features from memory. Reading a range of graphic novels meant Hannah and Laura also understood how such devices combine to design a narrative for a reader. The first panel of Hannah's draft graphic novel (Figure 5) demonstrates this. A wide panel shows a mountain range with two climbers waking up at base camp. On the far right of the panel one of the mountains in the range has a jagged crack. Hannah intended this as a deliberate visual hook for the reader, hinting at the climax of the narrative. She explained, 'It was up to you really whether you decided to give the clues first, 'cos that's quite a clever way of doing it really, there's that little bit there and you may not realise it at the time'.

Hannah and Laura went on to explain the importance of 'the little things' that build up to be 'something major' in the graphic narratives they had read. It was clear that the pupils had understood the balance between visual and written mode in the style of storytelling. When asked why she hadn't used a narrator's box to tell the reader about the crack in the glacier, Hannah responded, 'Because I didn't want the reader to know straight away that there was a crack. I wanted them to build up, so the little things matter a lot'.

For Hannah and Laura the design choices had become part of creating a text as a result of the prior teaching in the classroom. Laura stated, 'I think you do it automatically really. You don't think about what choice you're going to do because we've read so many comics and we know what a comic looks like and know what it is'.

The next section has a more detailed analysis of graphic novels using the writing assessment strands.

Case study 2 Learning to combine image and word

A year 2 class explored re-telling narratives, adapting known stories by taking characters and placing them in new settings. Prior to creating their own texts, the children had analysed two Anthony Browne picture books *Bear Hunt* and *Bear Goes to Town* to discover what the images and words contributed as separate elements of the narrative. The teacher then went on to analyse with the children what impact the written and visual parts of the text have on a reader when they are read as an integrated unit of meaning.

This approach to picture books, discussing and analysing the design of texts, was embedded in classroom practice alongside regular use of drama, film and role play. Drawing was highly valued in the classroom as a regular form of communication with a range of media readily available for children to use. In addition, texts from a range of sources were analysed to ascertain the key features of their text structures. The children were confident in using the language of narrative texts such as beginning, problems, character and setting. The outcome of the work was a sequenced storyboard narrative with the intention that the storyboards would be returned to later in the term as part of a second sequence of work.

At seven, Shaun's preferred mode of communication was visual. He was very capable orally but had considerable difficulties getting to grips with the technical demands of writing. Following oral re-tellings of the pictorial text to his teacher, Shaun became aware that his picture narrative would not be understood by a wider audience without the integration of a second mode of communication – writing. As a reluctant writer, his choice to build on the drawn text through written text marked a shift in his understanding of how texts operate.

Shaun's teacher observed him laying out the drawn text on a large roll of paper. Originally Shaun had positioned the drawn images in two parallel lines with one underneath the other. He also made design choices when he selected different sizes of paper to match the intended level of description and detail in the drawn text. When laying the sheets onto the backing paper Shaun realised that the narrative would be better understood if he placed the drawings in a single linear sequence at the top of the frieze to leave the space he required for writing underneath.

The first panel of the frieze (Figure 6) was larger than the others to establish setting and introduce the opening action. This panel was full of detail showing what is above and below the sea. Bear is on a boat on top of the sea. The submarines are trying to torpedo his boat. The written part of the text, added later, echoes the original picture book as Bear draws a sea monster to escape danger.

The second panel was much smaller, focusing on the two main characters – Bear and the sea monster – but giving prominence to the rocket. Bear and the sea monster are now below the surface of the ocean and the rocket is partly submerged. The written part of the text explains that Bear has again drawn himself out of danger.

Shaun devotes the third panel (Figure 8) to the action of the rocket, where Bear and the sea monster are shown in windows in the rocket. The sea is noticeably disturbed by blast-off and a passing fish is amazed. In the written text Shaun adds Bear's excitement at blasting off through the repeated use of exclamation marks and the verb 'yelled'.

In the fourth panel the rocket has safely landed. Here Shaun added details of processes that could not be captured adequately in a single image: Bear eating a coconut and the sea monster changing into a land creature. The image clearly shows the sea monster has grown feet while maintaining his fishy tail – adapted in Shaun's words.

Throughout the frieze Shaun created text cohesion both verbally and visually. In the images shown on the previous page, the surface of the sea is precisely aligned in the first three panels despite the gap between the sheets. Each detail of the rocket, Bear and sea monster are faithfully reproduced in each panel.

The written text clarifies narrative action for a reader. Without the written text the detail of the first panel would be confusing. Shaun has demonstrated that he understands the need for the written text to complement the visual to drive the narrative forwards. His meticulous reproduction of the characters and settings across a 13-panel frieze shows he can maintain a complex narrative that he would have found difficult to achieve through the written mode alone.
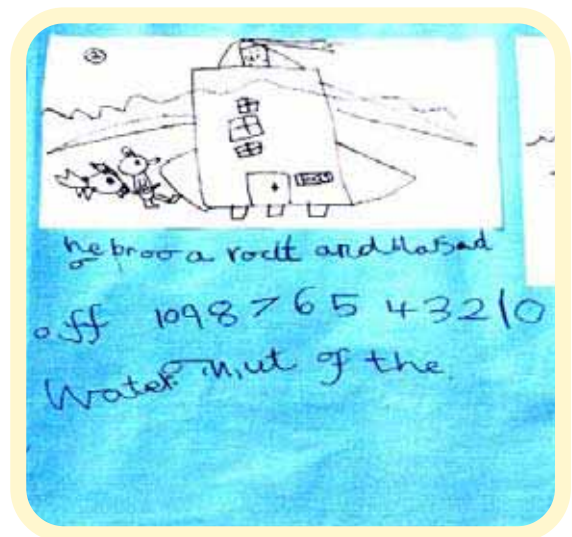

Figure 6 Shaun's first panel

Figure 7 Shaun's second panel

Figure 8 Shaun's third panel
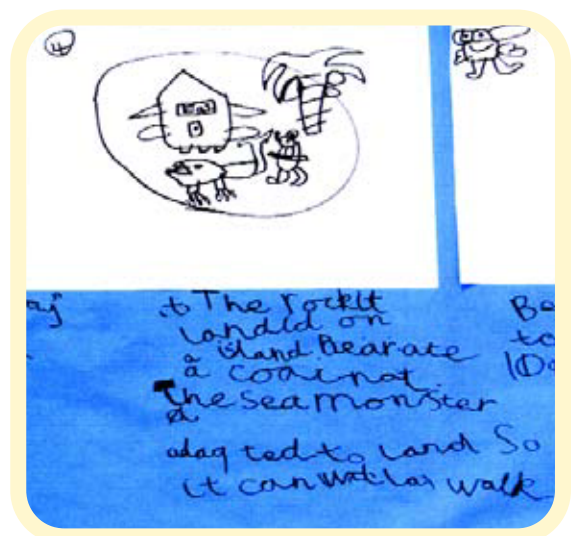
Figure 9 Shaun's fourth panel

Using the writing assessment strands

Composition and effect

This looks at children's ability to write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts and produce texts that are appropriate to task, reader and purposes:

- select and adapt form and content according to purpose, viewpoint and reader
- convey ideas and themes in appropriate styles.

Text structure and organisation

This focuses on children's ability to organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events, constructing paragraphs and using cohesion within and between paragraphs:

- select and use structural devices for the organisation of texts
- order and group ideas and material within sections of their texts to elaborate meaning
- maintain cohesion in texts of increasing variety and complexity.

Sentence structure and punctuation

This considers children's ability to write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences, and to vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect:

- select and deploy a varied and complex range of sentence structures
- use punctuation to mark grammatical boundaries and clarify meaning accurately and consistently
- combine grammatical structure and punctuation to enhance meaning
- use correct spelling.

The Billy Goats Gruff Year 2

A year 2 class spent two weeks on a literacy unit of work aimed at each child producing a picture book. The teacher, Cara Ansell, and teaching assistant, Anika Wilson, read and told different versions of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and J E Moe's *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* to the class. The children acted out parts of the story, told parts of the story, sang, drew story maps, drew the characters and thought of useful language to describe them. They discussed layout including the amount of words and pictures they wanted on each double-page spread and used ICT to make the covers of their books.

They shared each piece of writing in small groups and with the whole class. The final version was for an audience of year 1 children in the school, and when the books were finished, the year 2 children read and talked about their stories with the younger children.

Composition and effect

Anya creates her own interpretation of the Billy Goats Gruff story combining visual and written text, including sound effects, with a designed layout. Her purpose was to write in a humorous way to suit her young readership, with comic images of the irritable troll who wants to watch television.

She selects and adapts the original story both verbally and visually to emphasise the setting and the motivation for the central action of the story – the reasons for the Billy Goats Gruff having to move from the field on one side of the bridge to another. She conveys the key theme of the goats' need for decent food appropriately and consistently through her use of colour.

Anya presents the troll as a key figure by using him at the beginning and end of the book. She shows the characterisation of the goats and their family relationship using language, different sizes and posture.

She achieves narrative interest and tension through her design and placing of images and page breaks and, in the written mode, combining dialogue and the voice of the narrator.

Text structure and organisation

Anya sequences and structures ideas and events through layout, page breaks and white space. She presents the key elements of the narrative: problem, conflict and resolution in successive double-page spreads.

The cohesion of the story was maintained visually through colour in repeated themes: the troll, the contrasting barren and lush grass, the bridge and the images of the Billy Goats Gruff. Anya also uses the repeated sound motif *Trip Trap* to indicate narrative action. She creates cohesion in the written part of the book through patterned story elements, for example where each goat persuades the troll that his brother is more worth eating until he is tossed into the river by the biggest goat.

Sentence structure and punctuation

Anya effectively uses the syntax of traditional narrative. She sets the scene using storytelling cadences and selects mainly simple sentences to convey the key themes in the narrative. She reveals the goats' characters through a combination of images, dialogue and choice of verbs: *whined, moaned, whinged* and *screamed.*

Anya uses ellipsis to create narrative tension, and uses punctuation successfully to mark the speech of the individual goats. She uses full stops, question marks and exclamation marks consistently and in most cases accurately. On the final page she combines the written, the typographic and the visual to enhance meaning.
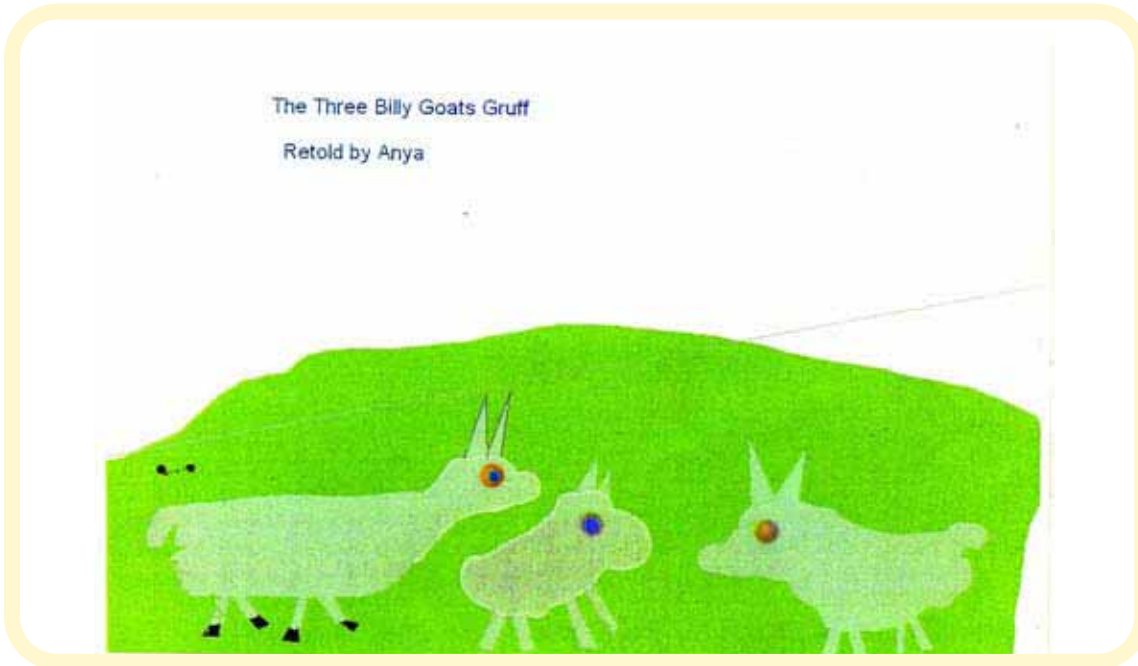
Figure 10: The cover of Anya's Billy Goats Gruff story

Figure 11 Anya's troll from her Billy Goats Gruff story

NOTES

A White space highlights the author's name and the role of the troll in the narrative

B The troll's character is represented mainly by the visual part of the text through Anya's choice of colour, shape and detail of spiky teeth and strange protrusions from the ears

Figure 12 Anya's three billy goats on a mountain top

▶ continued from previous page

A Colour and words combine to set the scene where they are *on a cold mountain top* and *starving*, the field is yellow

B The written text introduces the characters and their problem

C After the initial description, the field is not referred to again in the written part of the text

Figure 13 Anya's troll on the bridge

A Contrast between the barren yellow field and the green nourishing field is shown through long shot and mid-shot of the two fields linked by the bridge

B Conflict is presented largely through the pictures with a central image of the troll shouting *You're not crossing*

C Space is used to direct the reader to linger and breathe a sigh of relief with the two goats who have successfully negotiated the bridge

Figure 14 Anya's troll clashes with the largest goat on the bridge

A Tension is increased by placing both the troll and the largest goat on the bridge

B The only written text is the repeated sound effect *Trip Trap Trip Trap* and a brief dialogue between the troll and the goat

C The resolution is hinted at by the large image of the goat with lowered horns ready to charge
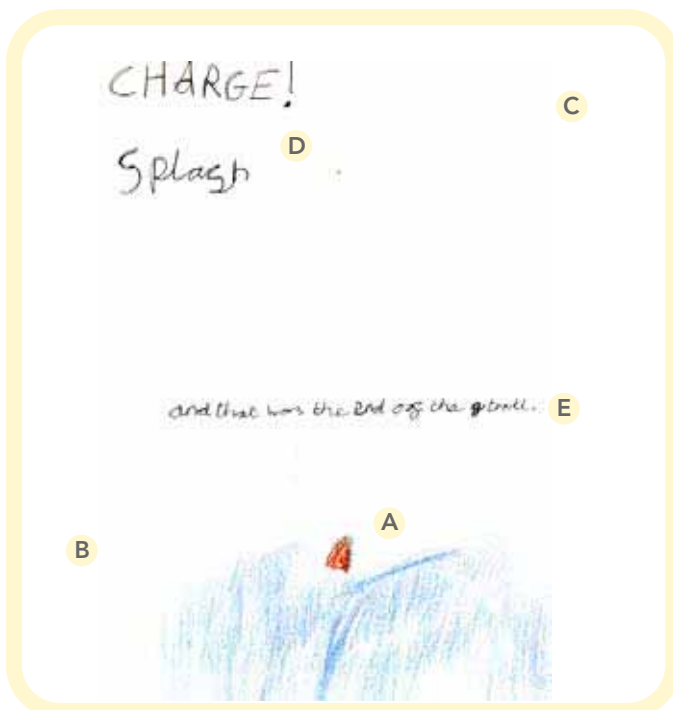
Figure 15 The last scene in Anya's Billy Goats Gruff story

A The troll image recurs as a motif throughout the book, signalling his key role in the narrative

B The final image acts as visual ellipsis causing the reader to wonder about the fate of the troll beyond the current narrative

C White space and spare visual image prompt the reader to see the events for themselves

D Upper case *CHARGE!* followed by cursive *Splash* occupies the top half of the page separating and emphasising the slow motion of the action towards the resolution

E The simple statement accompanied by the image of the troll's spiky red crest sinking under the water completes the resolution

Graphic novels Year 6

The work discussed here is from year 6 children, Emily and Warren. Their teacher spent some time explicitly introducing them to the conventions of graphic novels (as described in the 'Teaching multimodal texts' section) and they were given a choice of several different layouts of frames. Their choices reflect the ways in which they wanted to pace their narratives since choices of shape and organisation of frames in picture books, comics or graphic novels influence the way the story is told. Several small frames speed up the narrative while a large double-page spread will create a difference to the pace of the story, often representing a key moment in the action.

Emily and Warren both tell their stories in five episodes, but each paces the telling differently, choosing frames and layout to fulfil their purposes. The first page of each double-page spread is in draft form and the second with full colour.

Composition and effect

Emily has chosen to tell a superhero story in a comic book style, appropriate to the interests of her audience and drawing on her popular cultural knowledge of American superheroes. She has structured her story in five episodes. She begins with a character-in-place setting, choosing a timeless, modern narrative indicated by the computer and an armband 'trouble signal'. The size of the panels creates pace and atmosphere. Her first frame stretches the width of the page to emphasise the relaxed atmosphere, added to by the design within the frame. The character is central to the frame, surrounded by white space, with small but significant details – the picture on the wall, the pencil on the desk. After a narrow frame that injects urgency and sets the narrative in motion, she introduces the fuller setting of high-rise buildings. The cut-off picture of a raised arm with its ringing trouble alarm and the pencil on the floor abruptly shifts the viewpoint towards the central dilemma.

Text structure and organisation

Emily selects and deploys size, shape and relationships between frames to vary narrative pace.

She uses a variety of text cohesive devices: language, design, image and colour. The yellow caption boxes orient the narrative for the reader. The speech and thought bubbles provide a running commentary on the action from the hero's point of view. Characterisation is maintained through the designed placing of the superhero and the monster.

To order and group her ideas Emma uses clusters of similar-sized frames. The smallest three placed side by side at the top of the second page move the reader's eye quickly from a close-up showing the hero's determination, indicated by movement lines on the character's face, to distance shots of the antagonists. The lack of background detail focuses attention on the characters.

The frames are packed with background detail and large speech bubbles contributing to the turmoil of the narrative climax. The central placing of the speech bubbles within this grouping of frames leads the reader's eye to the resolution, while repeated images give cohesion.

Sentence structure and punctuation

The simple sentences in the caption boxes comment on the action appropriately since the detail is carried by the images. In contrast, the speech and thought bubbles supply the superhero's thoughts to emphasise clarity and purpose. Punctuation is used sparingly but Emily positions spoken words as visual punctuation, the spaces between them indicating pace, intonation and volume. In addition these words create the mood of the panel, using uppercase letters and larger print to indicate volume.

Emily's monster story

Figure 16 The opening spread of Emily's monster story
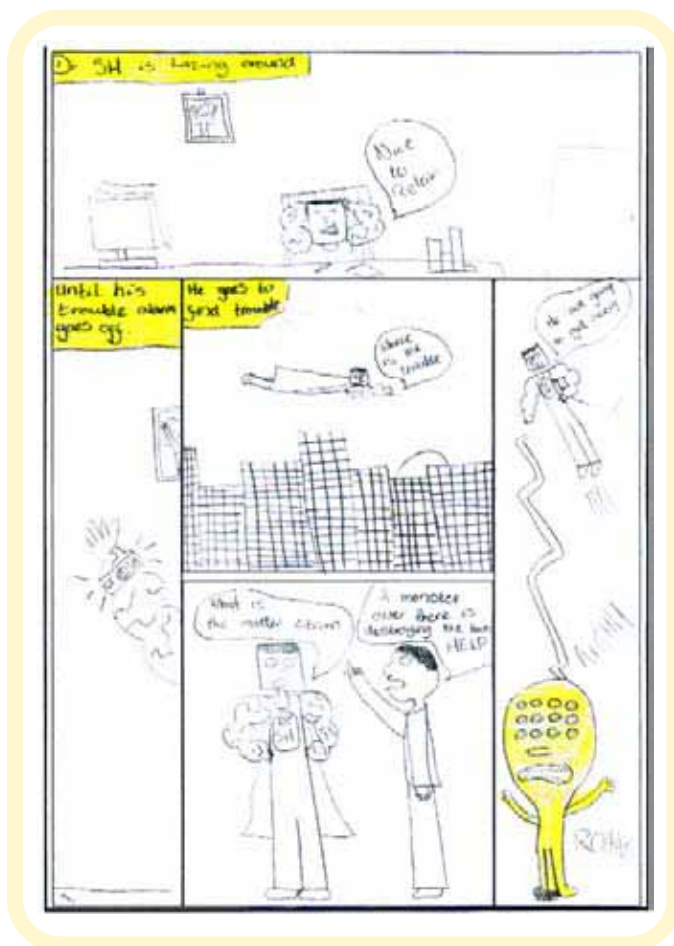
NOTES

In both Figures 16 and 17 the use of movement lines as 'graphic' verbs in the vibration of the alarm and the speed of the superhero's flight echo the comic book genre chosen

The split sentence across caption boxes acts as a cohesive device

The picture on the superhero's wall shown cut in half in the second frame emphasises the crisis

After the first image of the monster it is always in the position representing conflict – on the right frame. The superhero is shown flying through the air until the final frame where he has defeated the monster

Figure 17 The drama continues in Emily's monster story

▶ continued from previous page

The long frame at the opening of the second page creates narrative tension by emphasising the relative size of the monster, superhero and the townspeople

The graphic movement lines show the superhero's power rays and his muscular veined arms and square head maintain characterisation

The positioning and colour of the high-rise buildings, the raised arms of grateful citizens in the first and final frames and the sun act as time connectives

Marked uses of colour cohesion include the red blood dripping out of the monster's mouth and the colours associated with the central characters

Warren's samurai story

Composition and effect

Warren writes a five-episode story: setting, characters, central conflict, return home and resolution of conflict. He has selected the shape and size of the frames to pace the narrative action for the reader.

The drawing style is representative of Japanese manga comics. This stylistic choice is combined with a traditional western heroic narrative of a battle between good and evil. In keeping with the chosen genre, the sparseness of the images gives no unnecessary detail.

The setting of the initial battle is established in the first rectangular panel stretching across the first page of the narrative. A long shot places the reader at a suitable distance to see the two sides of the battle and orients the reader into the narrative. Warren uses the same device to establish a change in setting in the second panel of the second page. Description of setting and character are conveyed in the visual narrative.

The verbal text conveys the theme of conflict by choice of onomatopoeia and sound effects.

Text structure and organisation

Warren restricts a complex narrative to two pages, sequencing and structuring through framing and choices of long, medium or close-up shots. He chooses frames to structure the action and the relationships between characters rather than lengthy written explanations. He uses written cohesive devices to shift the action – *then*, *4 hours*, *but* – as well as visual cohesion through repeated images. At times he uses images to hint at events taking place behind the scenes.

Sentence structure and punctuation

Warren has chosen to use abbreviated sentences in keeping with the style and speed of graphic novel texts. He selects and deploys a varied range of sentence structures:

- *Home Sweet Home* and *His favourite vase* give the reader information that cannot be conveyed by the images

- he combines typographical features and punctuation to enhance meaning, using exclamation marks, size of print, speech bubbles, directional lines and asterisks.

Figure 18a Setting the scene at the start of Warren's samurai story
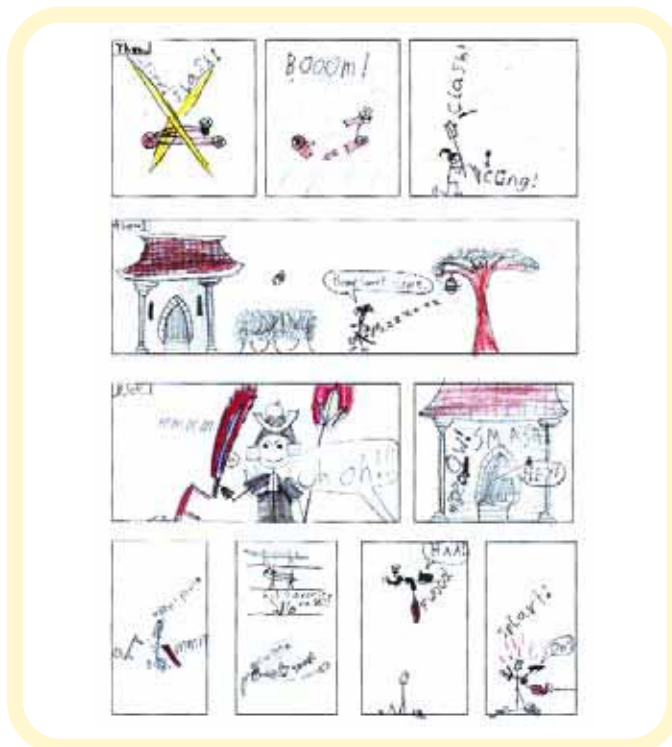
Figure 18b The drama continues in Warren's samurai story

NOTES

Four thin frames on the first page replicate rapid edits introducing the conflicting relationship between the opposing main characters

Close-up images focus the viewpoint of the reader

Short, staccato fragments give details of time and place: *1286 AD during the war between the Oda and Imigawa*; *Outside of Osaka Castle, during the siege*; *It is I! Yoshimoto!*

Frames guide the shifts in point of view

The story is established as set in ancient Japan by the representation of the pagoda style house with its red tiled roof, arched doorway and supporting pillars, the interior design of the house with the displayed samurai swords and the single beautiful vase displayed on a low table, together with the character's samurai warrior clothing

Colour is used sparingly but effectively, to create cohesion in the action – the red samurai sword and plume

The image of the broken vase creates a hook, hinting at later dramatic conflict

Defining and describing onscreen texts

Analysing onscreen texts has proved demanding. The most familiar kinds of screen-based texts produced in classrooms are non-fiction and there are many existing examples to draw on. There are many models of screen-based narratives but there is less familiarity with making them in the classroom. Teachers are less assured about making films of any kind – animation or live-acted – often because they feel they lack technical and professional knowledge.

Professional expertise in ICT is often not held by literacy coordinators in primary schools. Digital technology is not always available, although inexpensive small digital video cameras are becoming more widely available. In addition, although visual texts are included in the framework for reading, there is no explicit requirement for children to create their own multimodal narratives.

In using the writing assessment strands to describe the screen-based texts, the research team found that where paper-based texts are often the work of a single author who may have collaborated with others, screen-based texts are usually created collaboratively. This raises problems of authorship and makes it difficult for the teachers to use the assessment strands to describe what their classes had achieved. In view of this we have tried to select examples that were the result of paired teamwork since joint authorship is a feature of paper-based texts in many classrooms.

Another problem in analysing screen-based texts is that they are almost inevitably finished products that have been through a process of redrafting. In addition, when being represented in a booklet like this, they are only partial since onscreen presentations are often accompanied by speech or sound effects, and moving images cannot adequately be represented in printed form. Sound effects are equally difficult to represent on paper, and onscreen presentations can change each time they are presented. Also, gesture – an important element of multimodal presentation – cannot be captured at all in print.

We were intrigued by the different challenge offered by websites, another familiar type of screen-based text produced in classrooms, since they have a different structure – essentially different from narrative and from sequential presentations.

The teachers also found it difficult to assess the effectiveness of screen-based texts because judgements about ICT texts are often made on technical/skills-based criteria rather than on the quality of the meaning-making. The application of the writing assessment strands was helpful but indicated some areas where additional descriptors are needed for screen-based texts.

There are two examples of screen-based narratives in the following pages created by still digital images put together using presentation software to create picture books. A third example is of a web-type factual presentation.

Using the digital camera

As part of a year 3 class project to make digital image narratives onscreen, the class read and talked about *The Tunnel* by Anthony Browne, to become familiar with the text and the key themes. They discussed it as a multimodal text, considering how the words, images and design contributed

to the narrative. Drama was used to explore the emotions of the characters and for the final stories each group created freeze frames to illustrate particular moments in the action. Alice and Campbell chose to write their own adaptation of *The Tunnel*. This is a complex picture book text with the theme of reconciliation between a young brother and sister with differing interests. A group of six pupils, including Alice and Campbell, took responsibility for directing and taking the pictures to make their screen-based story.

Some of the freeze frames quite closely followed Browne's pictures while others were chosen to illustrate features of the story that the children felt were important.

The first six screens of Alice and Campbell's digitally produced picture book show how the writing assessment strands can describe their text.

Composition and effect

Alice and Campbell chose to use the basic narrative structure of Browne's book but to adapt it by reversing the characteristics of the boy and the girl so that it is the girl who is outgoing, active and adventurous, and the boy who is more reflective and solitary. In adapting the story specifically for their peers, they added the detail that the girl is older and her brother is younger and they also show the girl surrounded by friends. These adaptations shift the point of view to one that is nearer to the everyday experience of these young authors and their audience.

In conveying the ideas and themes they use their own facial expressions and posture to signal the central dilemma very clearly. In keeping with the original book they use shadows to create atmosphere and heighten the narrative tension. The verbal style is spare, leaving the associated images to add to the overall impact.

Text structure and organisation

Alice and Campbell chose frame sizes and dimensions to organise the main ideas. Images and words complement each other to build narrative action and elaborate meaning. At times the written text gives basic information about the characters and events, and the images give the detail of how the characters are different and how they feel. At other times the written text adds to the image.

Through words and images each screen adds detail to the depiction of the differences between the two characters and sets up the central conflict. Facial expression and posture aid characterisation and page layout emphasises key themes. Cohesion is created through repeated images of characters and in the verbal part of the text, time connectives trace the development of the story.

Sentence structure and punctuation

Alice and Campbell vary the sentence structures for effect. At times they use short, clipped sentences to allow the images to speak or to hint at how the narrative will unfold. At other times they use more complex constructions to add to the visual information. They use punctuation accurately, and mark sentences with full stops, mostly accurately, with no use of punctuation for emphasis since the written text is deliberately spare and measured. They use full stops to replicate pauses in the narrative and to create dramatic tension.

Once upon a time there lived a sister and a brother who were not at all alike. In every way they were different.

Figure 19 The first screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation of *The Tunnel*

The younger brother stayed inside on his own, playing on his PS2 and watching tv. The older sister played in the park shouting, laughing, kicking and catching.

Figure 20 The second screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation

At night the sister slept exhausted under the bed covers.

Figure 21 The third screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation

NOTES

Direct gaze of the images immediately draws the reader in to the characters to add to the written information

Facial expressions, particularly the eyes, and body posture indicate the specific ways in which the brother and sister *were not at all alike*

Inside and outside shots emphasise the boy's solitariness and the girl's active and gregarious life

Mid-shots show how they spend their time. The words emphasise the contrast between his solitariness and his sister's activity

Close-ups are used to focus on the different feelings of the boy and the girl

But the boy lay awake with the lights on scaredly scrunched up in the middle of the bed.

Figure 22 The fourth screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation

Sometimes she said, "I'm going to ge you little boy", at night.

The shadow image and the white space heighten the narrative tension of the words

Figure 23 The fifth screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation

Whenever they were together they hurt each other but they lost £2.00 of their pocket money every day.

Until the day when everything changed. The day their mum ordered them to play together.

A large mid-shot with more print than on other pages crams the available space, heightening tension

Full stops are used to indicate pauses as in an oral story and to heighten dramatic tension *Until the day when everything changed. The day their Mum ordered them to play together*

Figure 24 The sixth screen of Alice and Campbell's onscreen presentation

Using the conventions of film

Children in a year 6 class were asked to create collaborative narrative texts using the features of presentation software for an audience of their peers. They were to meet three specific criteria: the inclusion of humour, the creation of drama and keeping their viewers' interest. The teacher planned for the visual text to be completed first, and with this in place the children added written and sound text. As this is a lengthy presentation, slides have been selected to highlight specific features of their text. Sarah, Rachel and Harriet chose to write a romantic comedy – *Lovey Dovey Banana Split.*

Composition and effect

In this combination of drawn image, print, sound effects and speech, the children take the conventions of fairytale narrative, adding a modern context and humorous twist. The hero of the story meets the girl of his dreams on a blind date. Slipping on a banana skin he falls face down into the dirt and his new love abandons him. Sarah, Rachel and Harriet use a range of visual and sound devices to establish the romantic, fairytale nature of the narrative. On the introductory slide (Figure 25) rotating hearts are placed in the four corners. The sound effects and dialogue on slides 9 and 12 (Figures 28 and 29) emphasise the attraction further.

The children chose to tell the narrative from more than one viewpoint. The arrival of Scarlet, the female protagonist, is shown through Tom's eyes; then the viewpoint shifts to third-person perspective using a mid-shot to show the developing relationship between the couple. They used a number of film conventions to select and adapt their ideas for the audience. The viewpoint moves between Tom and Scarlet to heighten the tension of the blind date and the drawn image of the carriage is photographed closer up to suggest Scarlet's approach. Shots from different angles present Tom's downfall. The use of a repeated image, the red circle to highlight the dramatic moment and the following close-up (Figures 30 and 31), convey the melodramatic theme of the narrative. The children use sequences of images to echo film editing to create dramatic tension. After the close-up on the banana skin, the last few slides (not shown here) show Tom from a side shot as he falls, then the viewpoint shifts to a shot from above him spread-eagled, then to a close-up of him with his face in the mud.

Many of the slides have sound effects or dialogue. The first image of Tom is accompanied by a wolf whistle, Scarlet calls from the carriage 'Hi. I'm Scarlet!' and as Tom looks towards the carriage there is the sound of running footsteps suggesting his eagerness to meet her. The narrative ends with a shot of the heroine with a speech bubble *Ha! Ha! Ha!* with added spoken dialogue *Oh, you poor thing … you're dumped!* The combination of represented sound and dialogue onscreen and spoken sound effects and speech contribute to the overall effect of a successful comic drama. The children successfully fulfil the third criterion in the final screen (Figure 32), which directly addresses the audience and has an added song.

Text structure and organisation

Sarah, Rachel and Harriet have grouped the key elements of the narrative within individual slides. They have used the linear structure of the presentation software to withhold information from the reader and build tension. Four slides out of the total 19 are devoted to Tom's apprehension as he waits for his blind date. Cohesion across the slides is maintained through the visual element of the text, particularly colour. The children chose the same background for each slide and the drawn images of the characters, carriage and setting are consistently reproduced. Heart motifs are used to denote attraction

between the two central characters. The children reinforced the visual characterisation through the recorded dialogue between the characters. Rhyme is used throughout, as on slide 3 (Figure 26) as a means of narrative cohesion in keeping with the themes of humour and romance. The end of the story is rounded off with a print screen accompanied by song.

The children selected images, sound effects or print on screen to present specific types of information. The relationship between the two characters is entirely represented by drawn images and dialogue; the romance theme is created by repeated heart motifs and sound effects. Two screens are entirely devoted to written text in rhyme to give the action of the narrative that cannot be shown in still image slides. Other print on screen gives details of the title, authors/directors and a final address to the audience, which is also accompanied by song, all following film screen conventions for opening and closing titles.

Sentence structure and punctuation

In keeping with the pace at which the narrative is intended to be read, Sarah, Rachel and Harriet use short, complex sentences to convey the written elements of the narrative. Sentences are correctly demarcated using a range of punctuation to emphasise the drama and suspense.

Figure 25 Slide 1 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

NOTES

Cohesion is maintained through colour and the repeated heart motif

Written text in rhyme gives narrative action that cannot be shown in still images

Figure 26 Slide 3 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

Figure 27 Slide 7 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*
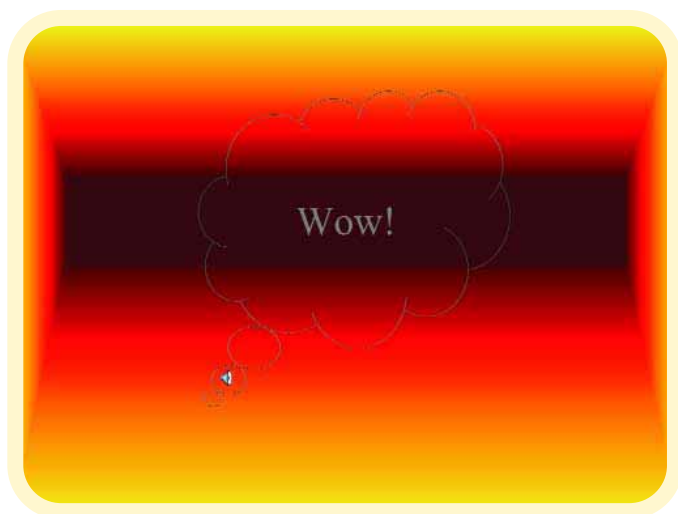
['WOW!']

Figure 28 Slide 9 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

['Hi, I'm Scarlet!']

Figure 29 Slide 12 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

Sound effects and dialogue emphasise the romantic theme

[kissing sounds]

Figure 30 Slide 13 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

Film conventions heighten dramatic tension
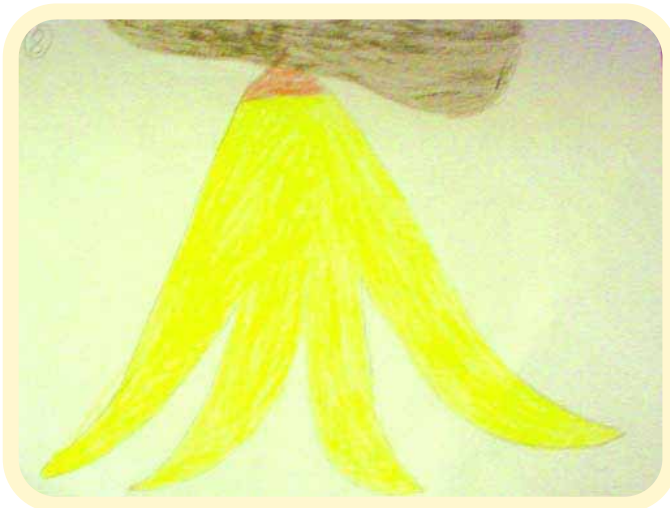
['Dan, dan daa…!']

Figure 31 Slide 14 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

[spluurt sound]

Figure 32 Slide 19 of *Lovey Dovey Banana Split*

Print on screen follows film conventions for opening and closing titles

['Lovey Dovey Banana Split' sung]

Hyperlinked text

After work with the whole class on the use of film to develop reading and writing, a group of six year 6 pupils presented their work at a conference attended by teachers. The use of presentation software was for the specific purpose of reporting key findings from their whole-class research to adults. They also knew that the onscreen text was intended as a support to their spoken explanation, including gesture. They repeated this presentation several times during the day, sometimes varying the sequence.

Figure 33 shows how the slides were designed to be presented as a whole text. Following the introductory slide, slide 2 contains four visual images. Each of these images is hyperlinked to a slide that illustrates the work undertaken. The slide is designed to be read by a variety of presenters linking from the central second screen and back again in a radial reading format. The images can be clicked on in any order without disrupting the cohesive flow of the text. When necessary the children chose to use a linear structure to their presentation with the final three slides following on in sequence from one another. At other times, for example, in response to questions, they disrupted both the radial and linear structure.

Composition and effect

The children select key features of their report to be displayed on screen. Content is minimal as the visual and written text is designed to be accompanied with spoken text and gestural text. On each screen speech bubbles and bullet points enable the reader to focus quickly on each piece of written text. The writers select visual prompts that orient the reader's eye and illustrate the written and spoken text.

The children adapt the usual linear pattern of the software through the use of hyperlinks so that the text can be read in a radial reading pattern as well as in a linear order. This supports the presenters' ability to deliver the text to the reader. The content has been adapted to create balance between the written, visual, spoken and gestural text for the purpose of a presentation.

The ideas and themes are presented in an appropriate style using the range of options within the software. The children use a restricted language style to summarise the key points of the text, in keeping with the need for reading at speed. The colours chosen for the background and text enable the text to be read easily and different fonts signify new ideas at the top of each slide.

Text structure and organisation

The children use the framing of the software to organise their ideas. Each slide represents one theme. They choose linear and hyperlinked slides to structure the report suitable to a non-chronological report, although they can also choose to present their work as a chronological narrative by their spoken explanation.

By adding hyperlinks to the images on slide 2, rather than separate hyperlink icons the pupils select appropriate and economical design features to organise their text.

Slide transitions sequence the material in a specific order within each slide building to a whole-screen presentation.

The text is designed to be cohesive as both a linear text and a radial non-chronological text through the hyperlinks on slide 2. Cohesion is also maintained through the constant colour of the slide backgrounds across the whole text and the spoken and gestural connectives used by the children. The children maintain cohesion across this complex text through the design of a hyperlinked text that allows both radial and chronological reading.

Sentence structure and punctuation

As this is a redrafted text, the punctuation is accurate. Punctuation is used sparingly since the verbal presentation adds any necessary emphasis.
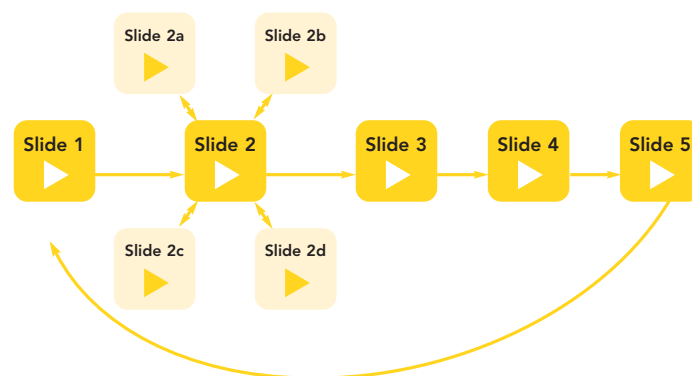

Figure 33 A flow diagram that shows how the slides were intended to be presented

Figure 34 The first click brings up the title of the hyperlinked slides

Figure 35 The second click adds an image of the film

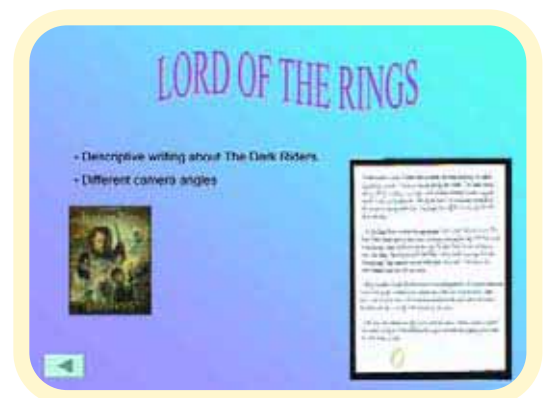**Figure 36** The third click adds an example of work

Figure 37 The final slide adds a summary of the spoken presentation

Key ideas and implications

Analysing multimodal narratives has proved more challenging than analysing non-fiction multimodal texts. Analysing onscreen texts has proved equally demanding since hypertext has different and more fluid structures and teachers' current knowledge is largely based on chronological narrative sequences.

The screen-based texts that we chose to analyse were mostly presented using presentation software. Although it has been possible to describe such texts in this booklet, we have noted that the annotations can only be partial since they do not take into account the spoken and gestural aspects of the presentations. In one case the children had added sound, both as dialogue and sound effects, introducing a further layer of complexity when describing such texts in a booklet.

The teachers

The teachers involved in this work found that they were rethinking how they read picture books, how they used and understood them. In order to teach children how to compose picture-book narratives, they needed a secure sense of how to analyse the contributions made by image, print and layout to a complex narrative. Teachers' existing knowledge of picture-book conventions was a great advantage.

Successful teaching of multimodal texts depends on having a vocabulary through which to describe how multimodal texts work to create their effects.

All of the multimodal texts in this project – screen-based or paper-based – took time to work on. Time is needed to discuss examples of multimodal texts and to help children see how the different components work together to make meaning. This may mean spending lengthy periods of time discussing one or two double-page spreads of a picture book or analysing the framing structure of a graphic novel. This suggests the importance of planning for two- or three-week teaching sequences that start by familiarising children with the conventions of such texts before making their own.

Effective teaching of multimodal texts is best achieved through planned teaching sequences which integrate reading, discussing and composing texts over a period of time.

Many children showed quick appreciation of the conventions of visual images and layout in multimodal narrative texts, which meant that teachers re-evaluated the children as readers. There was a more collaborative sense of making meaning from what they were reading. Issues of 'correctness' were much less prominent and children's comprehension and inferential abilities became more evident.

Reading for inference and analysing authorial intentions can be enhanced by teaching multimodal texts.

The children

There were some significant insights into the children's abilities as readers and composers of texts. In making their own multimodal texts, they were able to leave gaps in the text for the reader to infer meaning in much the same way as published picture book and graphic novel authors do. Children whose literacy skills were not considered high were able to construct quite complex narratives and to discuss and explain the choices they made. Children often drew on a range of experiences, including reading and viewing popular cultural texts, in constructing their own multimodal texts.

All the children made design choices to suit their intentions in communicating meaning. The examples shown in this booklet are evidence of texts that integrate image, print, sound and spoken dialogue in deliberate design layouts. From the earliest years many children are able to orchestrate different modes to represent their ideas.

**Teaching multimodal texts involves a reconsideration of reading and composing abilities.
Through teaching multimodal texts teachers often came to have higher expectations of children.**

Assessment

The research has shown that the writing assessment strands are largely applicable to both paper-based and screen-based narrative and non-fiction texts, certainly in terms of composition and effect. In looking at text structure and organisation it has been useful at times to add terms such as 'design', 'frame', 'episode', 'grouping' (rather than 'paragraph') to describe text cohesion. In sentence structure and punctuation, we have considered choices of place/position, use of space, font size and direction as well as punctuation to mark grammatical boundaries and clarify meaning accurately and consistently.

One of the key features of the screen-based text production was the collaborative nature of the work. This raises implications for assessment. The partial nature of the presentation software texts as presented here also suggests that a single assessment may not be the best way to evaluate screen-based multimodal texts. Teachers in classrooms can take account of the processes in making judgements of achievement.

There is scope for further work in describing and assessing multimodal texts, particularly in considering screen-based texts. Assessment of multimodal texts for formative purposes would be a fruitful area for further research.

Further reading

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About this publication

Who's it for?
Primary teachers, local authority consultants, advisers, inspectors and initial teacher training departments

What's it about?
This booklet describes how children use a combination of visual design and language to represent their ideas on paper and on screen

What's it for?
Information; guidance

Related materials
More than words: multimodal texts in the classroom (QCA/04/1290)