In Residence

Storied Away

Author **Frances Stickley**

In Residence: Storied Away

Who am I?

My name is Frances Stickley. I'm a picture book writer and the 2020 Author in Residence for Inspire: Culture, Learning and Libraries and I **love** stories. But who are you? You might be here because you've read the book that I wrote with Inspire's Artist in Residence Erin Fleming called *In Residence*. Or maybe you've had a go at some of my silly storytelling activities and made one of Erin's puppets! Well, whatever the reason you're here, I'm really glad you are because I've got so many story tips to share with you.

About this guide:

Here's where I do all the explaining about those bits of writing and stories that can feel a bit confusing, as well as offering games, tips and ideas to spark your imagination. I'll be sharing links and directing you towards exciting, creative FREE activities that you can access any time at www.inspireculture.org.uk/inresidence.

Adults corner:

If you're a teacher or a parent, this might be a helpful resource for you to explore the nuts and bolts of storytelling. You'll find lots in here that might not be covered in the classroom, with activities for children of all ages from babbling babies to teenagers.

Where do I start?

Stories are everywhere; in films, comics, computer games and of course, books. Starting a story of your own *can* be one of the best feelings in the world, but it can also be the trickiest part. The blank page might be a wonderful world of potential spellbinding adventure or, well, a little bit scary. Whenever I'm feeling a bit blank about the blank page and I don't know where my story will take me, I start at the beginning – with *plot and plotting.*

Plot and Plotting

You've probably heard people talking about plot before, but what does it mean? I like to think of the plot of my story like the bricks of a house. They're the events; the things that happen that, brick by brick, build your story, all made possible by the *narrative structure.* A narrative is another word for story.

What is structure? If plot is the bricks, then the structure is the scaffolding that holds your story up. There are lots of different types of structures you can use to create a story and they all have different names and features and certain rules they all follow. **The stronger your scaffolding, the stronger your story.**

The characters, the setting, the events – all these are the bricks and the mortar. The dialogue, the scenery, the imagery - all of these are the wallpaper and furniture, and underneath all of that, we have our structure, holding it all together, and by this point, invisible. So invisible is the structure by the end of the story, that lots of people don't even know it's in there, but I find it so helpful as an author to know my structure well.

Quest Narratives

There are lots of types of different structures you can use to build a story. My favourite, and one of the most popular, is called the *quest narrative.*

Lots of stories throughout history are about people setting out to change something, but exactly what that is, they don't always know. But one thing remains the same in all quest stories, our main character – our hero – returns back to the start at the end. However, they may not be exactly the same – they are changed in some way.

So you want to be a Storyteller? In fact, so many amazing stories are quests, that I've made up an activity for you to come up with your very own. Find out more about what makes a quest narrative and create your own epic story. All you need is the Quest Story Activity, a 6 sided dice and a little bit of imagination!

Psst: Author's Aside...

My book *The Mouse's Apples (Andersen, 2020)* is a traditional trickster tale, but it could be read as a quest story when we look at it from Bear's point of view. In this story, written by me and illustrated by Kristyna Litten, Bear sets out on a quest to steal as many apples as he can get his hands on, but by the time he returns home again, he has learned that friendship is far more important. He has changed in a way that he never expected, and for the better.

I do love a happy ending!

Top Tips for Creating a Quest

If you enjoyed creating your own quest narrative with my storytelling activity, you might find these top tips helpful for taking you even further on your quest…

1 **Create your character:**

Quests are all about how your main character feels and acts. You need to know them well. Often in a quest story, what happens to your character is different from what they anticipated, and there are lots of problems along the way, so you need to know how they tick and how they'll react to events.

idea

Some key questions you could think about to create a quest character

What does your character think will happen to them?
Are they wrong?
What do they want to discover?
What do they actually discover?
How would they describe themselves?
How would their best friend describe them?

2 **Be the hero:**

One character you know very well… is you! If you're not sure what your character would do next, ask yourself what YOU would do. You can change some details afterwards, but you are a very good place to start. After all, who doesn't want to be the hero in their own story?

3 **Plan and plot:**

Remember that narrative and plot are the foundations of our story, so we need to build them early on. It's quite tricky to change the narrative once you've built the rest of your story on top.

So what next in our quest story?

Here is one activity I just love for developing my quest narratives.

Story Mapping

● **You will need:** Paper, pens, some play figures.

I'm a very visual writer. I think in pictures rather than words, so I love to have a picture-plan of where my story will lead.

I love to plot my quest stories using a story map so that I can see the actual journey my character might take. I draw their home – the setting – and all of the places we might go. I even use figures to represent the characters and 'play' the story through, adding in all the exciting places characters might go on their *Road of Trials* before *The Return Home*.

You might even want to draw it as a treasure map for a pirate quest story. You could even age the paper with coffee water for a truly authentic story map.

Story Building

● **You will need:** Building blocks, stickers, pens.

If you want to make your story a little simpler, why not use real building blocks to create your narrative? You could draw pictures on stickers of your characters, your setting and the places they will go and build up your story brick by brick.

You could even play around with the order of events by rebuilding and switching the blocks – how does that change your final story?

Remember, storytelling isn't just about writing. In fact, sometimes it's not about writing at all. The earliest storytellers in history famously spread their stories by word of mouth and all storytelling then was about language and actions. You could talk through all of these ideas and build your narratives in pictures and actions, just like they did.

One Final Quest...

Now that you know what a quest story looks like, you'll find that you're spotting them everywhere! Some of my favourite computer games, films, comics and books are quest narratives.

? *Can you find any quest stories in your house?*

Of course, plot and structure are only one way that you might begin your story. There are lots of other ways to get started too. Why not start with your character?

Creating a Character

All writers start their stories in different ways. Some like to plan every detail, some like to get started straight away, some start at the beginning and some start at the end. There is no wrong way to come up with a story. Everyone has a different story to tell and the way that you do that will be very personal to you.

I always start with my main character, because asking myself questions about what they want and need is a really good way to plan my story. Beginning a story with your main character is a great way to get to know them and the kind of tale they want to tell.

Character and Genre

Genre: Often, you'll see character types that you recognise in different types of story. We call the type of story its genre: fairytales, detective stories, space adventures, cowboy stories, animal stories, ghost stories – all of these are types of a story, or genres.

Usually you'll find that the characters in a story are ones you might expect to see from that particular genre. When you see an illustration of a fairytale castle in the daytime, you might have a very good idea already of the kind of characters you're going to find inside. But look again at that same castle at midnight and it starts to take on a spooky feel – this shift in the genre of the story changes the type of characters that tell that story.

Archetypes: So in the same way that there are types of story, there are also types of character that slot into those stories. The fancy word for this is an *archetype:* it just means the kind of character you'd expect to meet in a certain type of story. So, if you turned on the television to see an image of a planet, the archetypal character might be an alien. When the princess cries, *Save me!* from the tower, the archetypal character you might meet next would be the brave knight on his horse coming to her rescue.

Compare these **archetypal** characters. Can you match them with their **genre?**

Haunted House   Saloon   Fairytale Castle   Space   Woodland

ghost   cowboy

alien   rabbit   astronaut

knight   princess

witch   bear

The Story Mix 'n' Match

One activity that I love for exploring character and genre is *The Story Mix 'n' Match.* Genre and archetypal characters are really useful for helping us to create and shape a story, but if we want to create something truly unique, maybe we should twist the rules a little bit...

Psst: Author's Aside...

I visit a lot of schools to talk about stories and I was lucky enough to be a teacher for ten years, so I understand how it feels to sit down and write stories for the first time. Sometimes it feels like there are so many rules around writing that it's hard to get started.

When I feel like that, I like to play around with those rules a little bit and see what I come up with.

You will need: A 6 sided dice. (Don't worry if you don't have one – you can also just pick a number.)

How to play: Choose a story type from the genre wheel.

Once you've chosen your genre, roll the dice to see which archetypal character set you're going to use to tell that story. They're numbered 1 to 6.
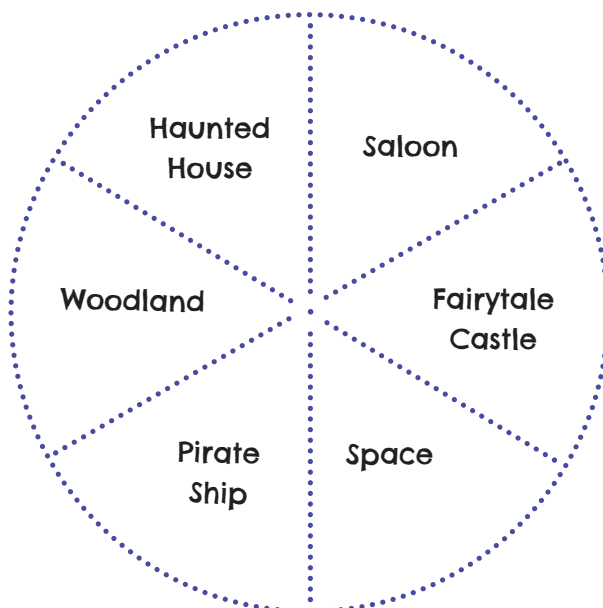
1. **Princess, knight, king, queen.**
2. **Aliens, astronauts.**
3. **Ghosts, witches, monsters.**
4. **Animals in a wood.**
5. **Cowboys, horses, masked riders.**
6. **Pirates, sea creatures.**

Genre wheel: Haunted House, Saloon, Woodland, Fairytale Castle, Pirate Ship, Space

When you know what your mix 'n' match is, set yourself the challenge of answering these 3 questions. You can write your answers or talk about them with a friend or a member of your family.

1 **Which one of the characters will be your main character?**
Most stories have one main character and it's their story that we're telling.

2 **What do they want to achieve here? What's their goal?**
All characters have a goal that decides the path they take through a story and the choices that they make.

3 **What's going to get in their way?**
This might be something that actually gets in their way, like being caught by a cowboy or washed up in a shipwreck, or it might be an obstacle they can't see – maybe a curse, maybe one of the other characters.

You can even add your own ideas to the genres and archetypes. Some of the best stories I've heard from children have come from the story mix 'n' match – a shipwreck in an abandoned shopping centre, a whale swimming through the clouds or a princess trapped in a tower rescued by an astronaut! This is a really wonderful way to shake-up those story rules and use them to create something brand new.

Heroes and Villains

One archetypal character pair that you'll find in most good stories is the **hero** and the **villain**, otherwise known as the goodie and the baddie. Our hero is usually the main character. Our main character tells the story and most often, it's the hero's tale that everyone wants to hear. That's why so many stories have a happy ending.

But the villain is also a very important character. They have a strong goal – something they want to achieve – and it's really important to know what your villain wants as well as what your hero wants, because your villain will be there to thwart your hero at every turn.

? **Talking time:** *What's your favourite story, film or computer game? Can you identify the hero and the villain?*

Lots of people picture heroes as brave warriors or fearless knights, but heroes come in lots of shapes and sizes.

Psst: Author's Aside...

I am a huge fan of unlikely heroes – characters that we would never expect to save the day. I love the element of surprise that they bring to stories.

In my book *The Mouse's Apples (Andersen, 2020)* illustrated by Kristyna Litten, a little mouse meets a big, scary grizzly bear who wants to take all of her apples. The odds are stacked against her. What could a tiny little mouse do to beat a big, bad bear?

Little heroes like this are usually very clever and cunning and use their wit and intelligence to beat the villain. *Can you think of any other unlikely heroes like this?*

Point of View

One of the things that writers do when they're creating a character is decide on point of view; that means asking, *whose side of the story are we telling?* We usually follow one character. We go where they go, we see what they see and we hear what they hear. We write as if we're in their shoes.

There are things our main character won't know. In *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, our hero – the little mouse – has no idea who he will meet when he sets off in the morning.

A good story remembers what their character knows and doesn't know.

Some stories have more than one point of view, but usually, these are split into different chapters or sections. It's hard for a reader or an audience to follow more than one point of view at a time.

For example, in *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt and Oliver Jeffers, every single page has a different point of view and it's the little boy, Duncan's job to listen to every point of view and do something that makes all of his crayons happy.

Here's an example:
Little Red Riding Hood skipped off into the woods to be eaten by the big, bad wolf.

Something sounds wrong there, doesn't it? Little Red Riding doesn't *know* that the wolf is waiting for her! After all, if she knew that, she'd never have left home in the first place!

This story is written from the main character – Little Red's - point of view. So it should read...

Little Red Riding Hood skipped off into the woods to visit her Grandma. The sun was in the sky and she felt wonderful.

Point of view can completely change a story, even when what actually happened hasn't changed at all. It's a really powerful storytelling tool.
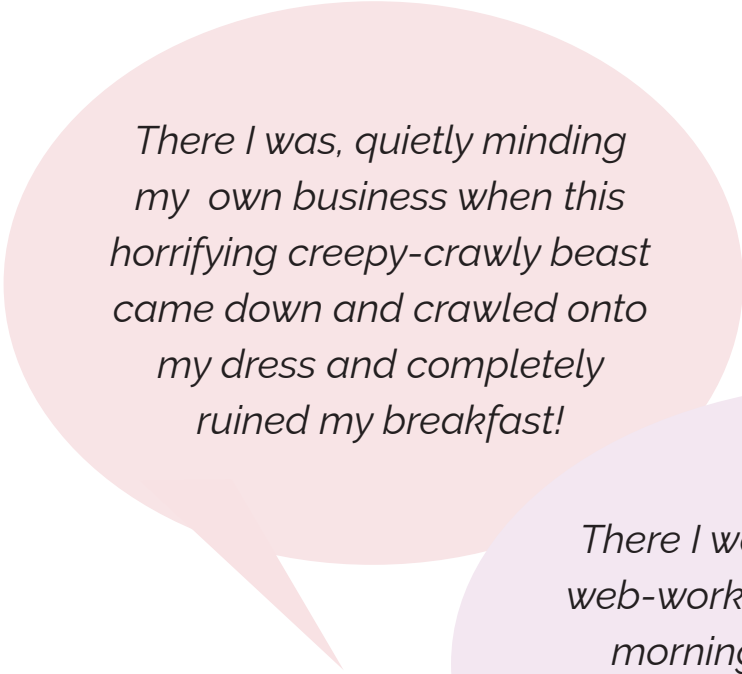
Storytelling: Someone Else's Shoes

Here's a talking activity you can use with your friends of family to explore how a character's point of view can shape a story.

1. Choose a fairytale or nursery rhyme that you all know.
2. Choose two or more of the characters. You could even choose one each.
3. Draw or imagine a speech bubble from each of them. *What would they say? How would they tell their side of the story?*

Here's one I came up with earlier.

Nursery Rhyme: Little Miss Muffet
Characters: Little Miss Muffet. The Spider.

There I was, quietly minding my own business when this horrifying creepy-crawly beast came down and crawled onto my dress and completely ruined my breakfast!

There I was, quietly practising my web-work on a beautiful summer's morning when this enormous, shrieking, curly-haired monster flung me a mile or more up into the air and completely ruined my whole day.

You'd probably always thought that the spider was the ***villain*** in this nursery rhyme and that Miss Muffet was the ***hero***, but now that we've heard the spider's ***point of view,*** it's suddenly not so clear.

Point of view is so important because it changes how a reader or an audience sees that particular character.

The Monster Mash Up: I love to play games to explore character, and the Monster Mash Up is one of my favourites! If you'd like to play this game, why not visit In Residence Online Activities and open the **Create a Character** PDF to come up with some truly weird and wonderful characters of your own!

Top Tips for Creating a Character

1 **Pick their pockets:**

Whenever I feel like I can't quite understand my character, I ask myself, *What do they keep in their pockets?* This is something I was taught at university and it's such a great tip. What a person keeps in their pockets tells you a lot about who they are, and once you've answered that, you can begin to ask other questions…

Perhaps they have a football whistle. *How did it get there? Does it work? Does it belong to them? Do they like football or do they play because of someone else?* And before long, you'll find your character is really taking shape.

2 **Scavenge for stories:**

Another thing I like to do is make collections. If I see something interesting, I'll put it in my story sack. I keep all sorts: train tickets, old jewellery, glass eggs that look exciting… and whenever I need to develop a character, I'll use all of these props to decide what they're like. I love props, and characters are perfect for this. After all, characters aren't just in books, they come alive in theatres and film and all sorts, so using physical items to explore who they are is so helpful.

3 **Motivation and obstacles:**

These are basically just big words that mean *What do they want?* and *What's stopping them?* They're probably the most important questions you can ask about your characters.

Sometimes, what your character thinks they ***want*** is not actually what they ***need.***

Captain Crabjack might ***want*** to find the chest of rubies but is that really what he ***needs***? Is that going to make him happy? Or will it take the love of Molly the Mermaid to teach him that all the treasure in the Atlantic Ocean won't lead to true happiness…

? **Characters are everywhere:** *The toy box, the bookshelves, the photographs on your walls. Why not go on a character hunt around your house. How many can you find?*

Story Suitcases: One other activity that I just love for exploring character is Story Suitcases. It's really simple – you can use almost anything that you have lying around your house. You just need somebody to time you! Why not visit In Residence Online Activities and open the **Silly Story Suitcases** PDF to find out more. Who knows? You might just meet the hero of your next amazing adventure.

Wizardry with Words

So now that we've had a look at some of the bigger aspects of storytelling, let's think a little bit about the language that we use. When I talk about language here, I mean the words we choose and the way we put them together to have an impact on the reader. The way that we put words together has the power to completely change a story.

Creating a Tone

You've probably heard lots of different words around language; *nouns, verbs, adjectives,* but one really important part of the way we choose our words is **tone.** The **tone** of a story, poem or a piece of art or music is the way it feels to hear it, read it, or see it. Often, a story will have a certain tone that runs all the way through it. You can almost imagine it as a voice that's telling the story.

Lots of different things might happen in a story that make you feel so many different feelings, but the voice – the **tone** – will feel the same throughout, and it's shaped by the language you decide to use.

Here's an example…

> **""**
>
> *The night was still, Captain Comet gazed at the moon as the ship bobbed on the gentle waves. His heart pounded with uncertainty as he saw…*
> *ARGGGGGGGH! A Sea Monster! It's COMING! It's…*
> *… snuggly and cuddly with big, red eyes and a tiny, itty-bitty nose!*
> *And – avast! Thar she blows! Seven sheets to the wind and lost to the sea forever.*

Can you hear how the voices feel like they're changing throughout the story? I've created too many different **tones** with the language that I've chosen; it almost feels like four different versions of the same event!

Language and Genre

The words that we use to create the **tone** are often closely linked to the **genre** of a story, poem or rhyme. When we talk about **genre,** we mean the type of story; be it a fairytale, a ghost story or a deep space adventure. In fact, the language that you use can completely change the genre of a story without changing anything that happens – that's how powerful the words and tone can be!

Let's try this out for ourselves.

I'm going to give you a list of 3 facts about a story that have to **stay the same** across all of the ways you tell it. Only the language you use will change.

1   The little boy left his bedroom.

2   The dragon was in the wardrobe.

3   The dragon came out.

Thinking careful about the language you use, write or talk about the first sentence of your story in these different genres:

A fairy tale / A horror story/ A love poem/ A picture book/ A nursery rhyme

I had a go at this earlier with my own fact file. Here's what I came up with, just to give you some ideas…

Genre	Opening Sentence
A fairytale	Once upon a time, in a castle far far away, a very brave and naughty little knight had locked the dragon inside the King's wardrobe.
A horror story	In a dark, dark wardrobe, in a dark, dark house, the blood-thirsty beast sharpened its claws and waited for its supper.
A love poem	Oh, wardrobe – all your finery would simply look divine on me! Oh prom dress, with your glittering jewels, how I wish I could be like you. Alas, I am but fire and bone. A dragon, bound to live alone.
A picture book	"Surprise!" shouted Digby the Dragon as he burst out of the wardrobe. "Digby!" cried Ben, "I can't believe you remembered my birthday."
A nursery rhyme	Half a pail of dragon's scales, a wardrobe and a game. Pull a dragon by its tail. Whoops! Mind the flames!

Tricks of the Trade

Writers and storytellers have lots of different ways of getting the most out of language. They often use poetic devices to talk about the world as if it were something else. They might describe the moon as a silver plate or a sideways smile or the night as a dark, lonely wolf. It's a way of making us look at the world in a new way, and it can be really effective in storytelling. It's also a really fun device to experiment with.

Silly Similes: Another great device for descriptive language is a ***simile.*** I know a really fun game we play to explore similes. Just pop over to [In Residence Online Activities](#) and open the Make Silly Similes PDF to have a go yourself! I wonder how many silly similes you'll be able to come up with!

Squelchy Storytelling

Another type of really fun descriptive language is ***onomatopoeia,*** which is just a really long word for; words that ***sound*** exactly like those things in real life, like moo or squelch or pop!

These words sound ridiculous! But they're very fun to explore.

I've come up with a very squelchy sensory game all to do with coming up with your own onomatopoeic language! Head over to [In Residence Online Activities](#) and open the **Make Squelchy Stories** PDF to find out more! Who knows what exciting new language you'll come up with!

Grasping Graphology

If you enjoyed creating your own funny language, you might want to think about creating a poem of your own. ***Onomatopoeia*** is great for poetry because so much of it is about the sounds and rhythms of words.

A written device that goes hand in hand with ***onomatopoeia*** is ***graphology.*** That's just a fancy word about writing – it means that we change the letters, colours or shapes of the words to fit with with what they're saying, like this...

BIG small tall SQUEEEEEEEEZE

red orange blue green yellow

Why not have a go at writing your own nonsense poetry using onomatopoeic words, maybe you could write it down using some of these aspects of ***graphology!***

Sensory Soundscapes

But of course, it isn't always necessary to write songs, poems and stories down. It's helpful, because it means you can remember what you've come up with but it's not vital and in particular when we're exploring language, there are often even better ways to present and perform. After all, if these words sound so wonderful, they should be spoken out loud.

How to create a soundscape: A soundscape is a collection of sounds performed together to create something new and exciting. Soundscapes might use instruments, but often they use voices and household items to create a very musical story, poem or song.

Soundscapes can be a fantastic way to generate descriptive language and make us look at things in a whole new way.

There are a number of different ways you can use this...

> **Soundscape stories:** Find everything and anything that makes a noise in your house; the radiators, the bin lid, the television, the alarm clocks. Decide which order you're going to use each sound to create a soundscape – begin with the first one, then build up the soundscape to include the other sounds. (Make sure everyone is awake before you do this!)
>
> You could even turn this into a story. Maybe this soundscape tracks your character's day. Maybe, from the first moment her eyes open to the sound of her alarm clock, these are the sounds that your character hears and we can build a story around these sounds and what they mean to her. I call this **sound-plotting** and it can be a really nice way to structure a story.
>
> **Soundscape scatting:** Using the words that you came up with in our soundscape stories activity create a soundscape using your invented language. You can repeat and alternate your words in different rhythms and patterns. You might even want to create a beat, or a number of different beats, using items from around the house as discussed above.
>
> Some people call this a **sound-poem**. It may not even have complete sentences and it almost certainly won't rhyme but it plays with language and aims to share a tone and a feeling with the listener.
>
> **Searching for sounds:** Going on a sound walk is a really lovely way to tune into different musical aspects of language. There are sounds that inspire language all around us; cars, train whistles, birds singing. Why not see how many you can hear? You could even try and come up with your own onomatopoeic words or phrases to describe them.

For even more ideas about getting creative with language, pop over to In Residence Online Activities and open the **Poetry Pieces Activity** PDF for my **Top Tips for Wordplay!**

Poetry Pieces

We've explored so much about language and the way that words can shape worlds, but what about the next step? Sometimes, shaping those words into a poem or a story can feel a bit scary. It's great to have strange and wonderful words, but what about stringing them into sentences?

Well, look no further. I'm going to leave you with one final activity that will help you to shape your own poetry using nothing but scraps of words, a pair of scissors, a stick of glue and your own creative instincts.

Just visit In Residence Online Activities and open the **Make Poetry Pieces** PDF to create your own surprising cut up poem. This is one of my favourite ways to create poetry and I hope you love it too.

Psst: Author's aside...

Thank you so much for coming with me on our storytelling quest. From plotting to poetry, from worlds to words, I really hope that you've found something here that inspires and sparks stories in you. Don't forget – you can come back to this guide any time you need it. It's yours. If you're interested in exploring any of the things that we've discussed further, you can find some amazing guides to stories and writing in your local library, but one of the best ways, of course, to understand storytelling is to read, read and read again all of your favourite stories.

And don't forget – the best resource you can ever find for telling a great story is you; your voice, your big ideas, your life. Every story starts with you.

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