

The Art of Language

Reading and Writing Extension Workshops

Reading and Writing Narrative



Reading and Writing Poetry



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Workshops for Schools



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WORKSHOP ONE

The Magic Makers Year 6 Workshop: **Reading and Writing Poetry**

Length of Session: 150 minutes

Aims of the Workshop

- To explore ways of constructing and deconstructing poetry texts.
- To develop an understanding of the creative process – both the inspiration and the perspiration!
- To provide a platform for an end-of-year integrated learning Module.

Introductory Session

Length of Session: 30 Minutes

- I introduce myself and the poem, with an explanation of how my cat Molly was the initial inspiration for the new book and how my grandmother gave me the idea for one of my Magicians. The children will need copies of the *The Magic Makers* and I provide a number of Powerpoint slides.
- In my personal introduction, I read a few examples from my first book, *Beastly Bites*. This is an alphabetical set of rhyming couplets about animals and eating. I tell them that I write a birthday story and a Christmas story for my neighbours' children and give a couple of examples.
- Returning to *The Magic Makers* itself:
 - (a) I look at the planetary system on the back cover, focusing on the sequence of the planets and commenting on their names.
 - (b) I outline the story, telling of the birth of planet Earth and then take the first four Magicians in turn, looking at the illustrations and discussing the part the Magicians play in beautifying the new-born planet.
 - (c) I read 'The Sun Awakes' and explain the idea behind 'The Shaping Magician' before having a quick look at the part played by Ariel as he introduces the seasons.

Session Two: Close Reading

Length of Session: 60 Minutes

Phase One

- Group discussion about what makes poetry different and why poets might be seen as Magic Makers. The discussion is likely to touch upon a number of aspects but this Phase will emphasise:
 - Rhyme – what it emphasises, hard/soft rhymes, choice of rhyme words.
 - Rhythm – the music of language, how rhythm gives emphasis to key words, different rhythms for different moods, the human heartbeat as the basis for iambic rhythm.
- The group is divided into four mini-groups, one for each of the Magicians: the Mercator and Flora groups will be more challenging!
- I read each of the first four Magician sections of the poem aloud, after which the children will comment upon their section – looking at the character picture, discussing the name of the Magician and commenting on rhyme and rhythm. In addition, the Mercator Group will be asked about nouns, the Dawn Group about word association i.e. specifically linked to colours, the Flora Group about verbs and the Prometheus group about adjectives. Each group will identify a favourite line or aspect.

Phase Two

- This session will start with comments on:
 - Difficult words, like ‘tempestuous’ and how you can ‘work them out’ – partly their sound, partly their context, partly their companion words and, in illustrated books like *The Magic Makers*, from the pictures.
 - Onomatopoeia – the idea of ‘good sound words’ such as “bracken crackled”.
 - The magic of imagery like “antlered oak” – where images come from, how they work and why they *are* magical.
- The Mercator Group will talk about the imagery linked to their Magician; the Dawn Group will look at difficult words; the Flora Group will comment on personification; and the Prometheus Group will find examples of onomatopoeia.
- Children in groups will prepare and read a four-line section of the poem, giving emphasis to key elements.

Phase Three

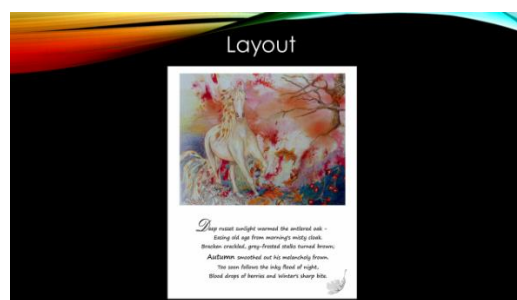
- Finally, we look at the Ariel section of the poem. The Flora Group will be linked to Spring; the Dawn Group to Summer; the Mercator Group to Autumn; and the Prometheus Group to Winter.
- Each Group will practise and then read their section.
- Each Group will say what they found most enjoyable **and** most striking.

Session Three: Children as Language Magicians

Length of Session: 60 Minutes

- Each group will invent a new Magic Maker e.g. The Waterfall Magician. If this proves to be too difficult, they will have the option of choosing one of my four Magicians and where necessary I would provide a cloze exercise to simplify the writing exercise.
- They will invent a name for the Magician, perhaps the name of an actual waterfall (e.g. Victoria) or a synonym (e.g. Cascade).
- They will then write down words and images which they associate with waterfalls. Words to do with power, roaring sounds, splashing, falling, colours. Images – perhaps a cloak of water, the hair of a goddess or an angel, a volcano.
- Finally, they will assemble these into a four-line verse, using: ten-syllabled lines, rhyming couplets and a selection from the words and images they have assembled. This will involve group activity and responding to each other's work to promote a supportive approach to the development of writing skills
- To conclude the session, the end results will be read out.

Selection of slides from Workshop One



The Magic Makers Sample Pages



The Sun Awakes

In which the Earth is born

The Sun awoke and shook his golden head:
"A dream has taken hold of me," he said.
My inner eye beheld a wondrous birth;
To Mars and Venus – a fair daughter, Earth."



The Flower Magician

In which the dew-drops from Flora's hair
become flowers.



Two moonbeams parted in the mists of dawn,
Where Flora came, by silken cobwebs drawn.
And where she breathed into the chilly air,
Or shook the morning from her golden hair,
The spangled dewdrops melted into flowers
Which fell to earth in rainbow-coloured showers.



Deep russet sunlight warmed the antlered oak –
Easing old age from morning's misty cloak.
Bracken crackled, grey-frosted stalks turned brown;
Autumn smoothed out his melancholy frown.
Too soon follows the inky flood of night,
Blood drops of berries and Winter's sharp bite.



As he withdrew behind his scarlet veil
And called upon the haunting nightingale,
He said, "Beneath my coverlet of stars,
I'll dream again of Venus and of Mars!"



Workshops with John Eames



Sample Outcomes: Children's Writing

Original writing from the final thirty -minute session of the 'Reading and Writing Poetry' workshop.

1. Amanda: Imag the Magician of Creativity
He used his imagination to make many creations.
His brain exploded with creativity and joy
But at the same time the darkness tumbled down the void.
The words from his mouth came out and made an idea shout.
He sat and wrote a book of poems
Talking and informing of how he thinks the world was created.
He told and read the book to many round the world.
2. Usman: Blur the Speed Wizard
Blur can make things fast and slow.
How does he do it?
Nobody knows.
Get ready, get set, go, go, go.
3. Georgia: Beautifusilly
Beautifusilly creates love and beauty;
She has fragrance so fine and fruity.
Her powers leave people eternally stunned;
Her love leaves people a wonderful fund.
The touch of her soft hair so delicate and divine
Gives the sweet scent of a red berry wine.
4. Janib: Lavender
Lavender creates plants and flowers; she decorates the plain land. Using her own bare hands,
her creations leave people completely mesmerised. She weaves patterns and flowers; she loves
her power to make amazing creations, using her wide open imagination. Her scent creates love
and happiness. When a flower falls, a new one rises up in plain sight and is sent amazing
colours.
5. Jaydon: Jake the Magician
Jake the Magician wrote a long book
Of spells that took a long time to cook.
On Sunday he likes to turn men into frogs
And sometimes to turn kids into logs.

Jake the Magician had a mission to pull the car ignition!
6. Yasmin and Zainab
My favourite flower is a rose,
I like to hold one when I pose.
It makes me feel like a shimmering star
That is out in space so very far.

Evaluation Comments for Workshop One

Year 6 Co-ordinator:

Thank you so much for the brilliant day on Monday - you and Jackie were lovely with the children and really got them hooked right from the start! Your introduction and activities were well pitched to the needs of the children and you helped make the language of poetry accessible for them all.

The children really loved *The Magic Makers* book - both the illustrations and the language (they particularly liked using the word 'diaphanous'!). We love your book too and we're looking forward to using it after half term when we plan our poetry work.

We very much hope and look forward to having you and Jackie back next year.

Year 6 Co-ordinator:

Personification is a difficult concept for some children to understand and this workshop supported the children's understanding well through its delivery. It provided the introduction and stimulus for work on poetry which will be covered in the next half term. The book, with its beautiful illustrations and language, captured the attention of all children and inspired them to write their own short poems after the workshop. This has provided a good foundation for the poetry work to be covered later.

Year 6 Co-ordinator:

The children most enjoyed making up their own lines of poetry using the style of the Magic Makers. They also liked exploring some of the sophisticated language from the book in their drama work (using movement and gestures to portray word meanings).

Head of Year 5:

The children particularly enjoyed writing their own poem inspired by a magical being. Having John read the poem out in a rhythmical fashion really inspired the children to take ideas and include them in their own poems!

Head of Year 5:

The content taught was very appropriate and the children were engaged for the whole length of the time which meant they did enjoy it! The content of the poem has given us lots of ideas to work from in our next Poetry unit in English. We are very thankful to John for instilling a love of poetry in the children!

WORKSHOP TWO

Leafcutter

Year 6 Workshop: Reading and Writing Narrative

Length of Session: 150 Minutes.

Aims of the Workshop

- To explore ways of constructing and deconstructing narratives.
- To develop an understanding of the creative process – both the inspiration and the perspiration!
- To provide a platform for an end-of-year integrated learning Module.

Introductory Session

Length of Session: 30 Minutes

- The children will need a copy of the book and I shall provide a number of Powerpoint slides.
- I introduce myself and my writing, including a mention of the children next door, for whom I write a birthday story and a Christmas story every year. I shall tell them about some of these stories and read a brief extract from *The Boy with Four Hats*.
- I shall follow this with an account of how Clive from the Butterfly Farm commissioned the book after seeing *The Magic Makers*. I shall mention his conservation work in Belize, his enthusiasm for the leafcutter ants and his suggestion that the story should be a little like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which Alice falls down a rabbit hole.
- Focusing on *Leafcutter*, I shall:
 - (a) Talk about my **research** into the ants and the importance of getting facts right when you do a story like this. I'll explain that doing your homework can give you ideas for **characters** (like the Queen and Goldie) as well as action (like the attack of the armadillo).
 - (b) Look at the different **settings** and how they add interest – in themselves and through contrast.
 - (c) Say that many stories have a **moral** to them. I shall say that I wanted to emphasise conservation and the ways in which humans have damaged areas of the planet.
 - (d) Talk about the importance of Annie, partly as a central character and partly because she ties the story together.
 - (e) Give an outline of the whole story and talk about the need to have a clear structure.

Session Two: Close Reading

Length of Session: 60 Minutes

Phase One

- Open group discussion about the main ingredients of a good story. This will add to the points raised in my introduction and is likely to include:
 - **Setting**, including atmosphere; contrasting settings.
 - **Action**, including some idea of progression: situation, intention, conflict/frustration, resolution.
 - **Characterisation**, including (a) age, gender, occupation, emotional type (b) motivation, intention, opportunity.
 - **Genre**, such as realistic, humorous, detective, adventure.
- **Reading** of pages 1-2 from *Leafcutter*. Small groups identify different ingredients from the list they have made and say how successful they think the opening is. Does it make them want to read on?
- Brief discussion of the illustrations and how they help understanding.

Phase Two

- **Reading** of pages 28-30, preceded by a brief explanation of the predators, the setting in the formicary and of the three characters: Annie, Goldie and the Old Maya Woman.
- Small groups undertake close reading, modelled on the SATs Reading Test:
 - Dialogue, its layout and how it can help to create character.
 - The present tense and how this can add to dramatic impact.
 - Similes to generate mood and humour.
 - Adjectives to create atmosphere.
 - Unusual vocabulary to create character and generate humour.

Phase Three

- **Reading** of pages 35-36.
- This short element of the session will look at Structure. I shall outline the story as a whole, linking in the earlier readings of the start and a dramatic central section.
- Small groups will discuss what makes a good ending and decide how effective they find the ending of *Leafcutter*. This can include comments on the leap forward in time, the reminders of the early part of the story, the moral and the quirky last paragraph.

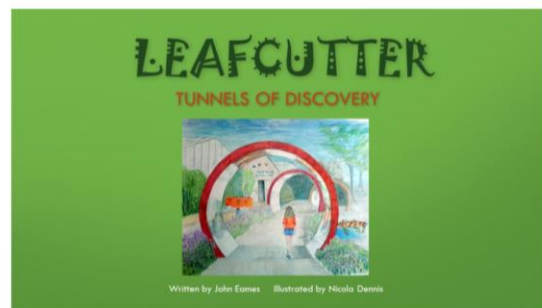
Section Three: Children as Authors

Length of Session: 60 Minutes

Like any of the sections in this Workshop, Section Three can easily be modified to align with the work of your School. What is provided here is an exemplar of how I would approach creativity with young writers.

- At the centre of this new story, to be written by the children, is the idea from *Leafcutter* of shrinking to gain access to a normally unseen world. The session will begin with a whole group discussion of which worlds the children might want to enter and explore. Possibilities would be: a bee hive; the weasel's world, with no permanent burrow; one of the many different habitats of a butterfly; the burrow of a water vole.
- Smaller groups will then think through possible *scenarios*. How will the central character(s) shrink? How will they enter the mysterious world? What would they hope to find? What might be the dangers? Which creatures will they encounter? How will they get out? What will they have learned or discovered?
- Small groups think about the key *elements* of the story: Setting (any research necessary?); Structure (beginning, middle and end, with a few obstacles along the way); Characters (some to trust and some not to trust); Characterisation (age, gender, etc.); Moral of the story (depends on the species chosen but might touch on some of the points raised in *Leafcutter* such as the strength to be derived from organisation or the environmental threat of human activity); Stylistic issues (tenses, dialogue, any imagery); Genre (probably adventure but with genuine opportunities for humour, maybe horror!).
- After half an hour, individual children write their opening paragraphs, thinking about: how to set the scene; how to grab the reader's attention; how to create an appropriate atmosphere.
- At the end of the session, individuals read out their work.

Selection of slides from Workshop Two

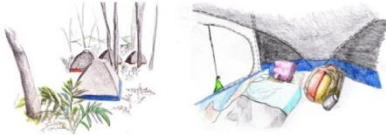


LEAFCUTTER Sample Pages

LeafCutter Tunnels of Discovery

Annie blinked her eyes open. Yes, she could believe in the tent. It was normal, reassuring, rather boring in fact.

But would she dare, could she, open the flap to the tent? Would that world of wonder still be there? Would her heart stop? Would it once more burst with joy as it had on her first thrilling journey into the rainforest?



Three years before, on her tenth birthday, her scientific Mum had taken her to a Butterfly Farm. It was a world of joy, beauty and wonder.

Annie loved her science lessons at school and had become passionate about the world of nature. Her mind had become like the world's first paradise. It was full of all living things – plants, trees, the wondrous creatures and ... and, yes, butterflies were her favourites.

~ 3 ~

On the information board, Annie and her Mum read that all of these **worker** ants were female. "Not entirely unlike humans, then!" Emily remarked.

Annie liked the way in which Charles had described the butterflies as "the canaries in the coalmine." She would never forget that. Charles was telling Annie that we live in an interconnected world. He clearly believed in the importance of all things living in harmony.

Annie remembered that coalminers once took canaries into the mines with them; if a canary struggled with its breathing, the miners knew that harmful gases were present and made a hasty escape. Back on the computer, Annie discovered that some species of British butterflies had *declined by up to ninety percent*.



Her Mum talked about 'loss of habitat' and an 'unhealthy eco-system'. "Bad news for us all!" Annie thought. Charles was right. It was like feeling the pulse of the world and that pulse was getting weaker.

~ 6 ~

In the evening, Annie read the guidebook she had bought from the Butterfly Farm. Funny how looking at an ant can change the course of your life! The day starts in a rainbow shower of butterflies; your Mum coaxes you towards a host of minibeasts; a little army of ants mesmerises you; and you encounter Charles! Even aged ten, Annie was in the grip of a passionate determination to make the world a better place.

A year passed. Moving to a secondary school had proved difficult for some of her friends. All those subjects to keep up with. But Annie had found a magic pathway. She saw everything through the prism of a joined-up world.

"Just think butterflies," she told her puzzled friends. Geography for her meant habitat and what could live where; History made Annie think about how humans behave (perhaps 'misbehave' would be a better word) and how that changes the world; Art and English could find their inspiration in the natural world; Biology was obvious; Computer Science let you check the progress of a species and solve the problems of conservation; Maths, oh the wonders of Maths ... shape, space, symmetry; and French? Well, yes, perhaps that was pushing things a little far!

These subjects were like pebbles pounded by the ocean waves, never losing their identity but becoming smoother at the edges. And just as Annie could sink her imagination into a pebbly beach, finding different shapes and textures and patterns, this way of seeing the world helped her to understand how different cultures and traditions might come to make sense of the world in different ways.



She had tried out this theory on Mrs. McClintock, her Biology Teacher. In fact, she had brought Mrs. McClintock to such a state of exasperation with all her questions and theories, that Emily had promised to restrain her daughter's inquisitiveness.

Even at home, Emily had felt the need to make a pact with Annie. No holidays until the Christmas of Year 9 when, it was a promise, Annie could go on a World Challenge expedition to Belize, a small country in Central America!

~ 7 ~

In her tent, Annie has just woken from a dream. It was the memory of her Mum, Emily, shaking from head to foot as she made the fantasy a reality. That simple click of a computer mouse which had secured the trip to Belize. Emily's tears and tangled emotions had been like a spider's web at dawn – beautiful but troubling.

Now, here, Annie has her own mixed emotions. Her dream has been swept away by the symphony of the waking world. The morning's mysteries are unfolding.



A scuttling sound ... Inside or outside the tent? Perhaps a Hercules Beetle with its rhinoceros horn, scurrying for shelter after foraging for fruit under the velvet cover of night. Harmless but scary!

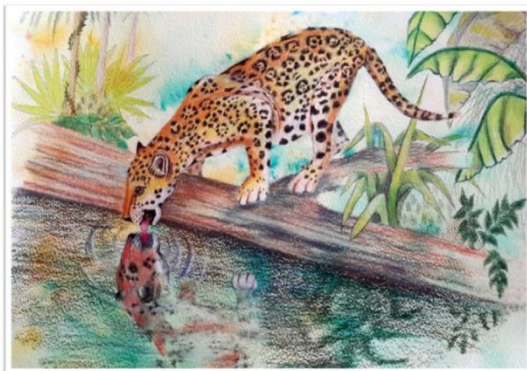
That grunt must be an Armadillo, the little armoured one, digging for grubs. She recalls its textures, as though carrying the imprint of a net, cast by a heavenly fisherman.

"Chack, chack." Like the prized jewel of a Tudor monarch, the Red-Eyed Tree Frog vibrates a branch in its watchtower amidst the rainforest's fronds in hopes of attracting a mate. Its scientific name, *Agalychnis callidryas*, tells us it is 'a beautiful wood nymph'. Asleep, it hides its bright colours but under threat it dazzles its predators. Annie is charmed and fascinated.

Unignorable ... but the truth is that Annie so much prefers the Iguana. She had been captivated by its look of defiant curiosity; her heart had stopped at the daring of its mighty leaps; and she had been engrossed by its sagging dewlap, as though it had tried and failed to swallow a hoard of golden coins.



~ 8 ~



~ 11 ~

Trekking through the rainforest has acclimatised Annie and her travelling companions to the jungle conditions. Today, the last before they join the project team, will be their 'Maya Day'. ***It is a day which will change Annie's life for ever.***



Annie has heard of the Maya civilization and seems to remember pictures of some impressive buildings looking half-castle and half-temple. Xunantunich, or 'Stone Woman' in the Mayan language, is the most important in Belize. The guide tells them that the *ancient* name of the site is lost to history. Its present name refers to a ghost, deathly white with burning eyes which, local people say, climbs the long, dramatic stairways to the very top of the Castillo and disappears into the rock.

Annie finds the buildings dramatic rather than beautiful and is more impressed by what she hears about Maya culture: their astronomy and use of calendars; their use of a hieroglyphic writing system, a little like the Ancient Egyptians; their amazing sculptures – faces, courtly scenes, remarkable animals, ravishing headgear; and, a mouth-watering discovery for a 13-year-old girl, their gift of chocolate to the Western world!

What depresses her is how it all ends. The Europeans (Spanish in this case) invaded and destroyed much of what they found. She is already passionate about the preservation of animal species but is beginning to feel History stirring within her. The desire for power and human greed have done so much damage.

She wonders how anyone could ever be bored in such a place. So much to discover, so much to do. For now, though, she shakes her head, feels it has been an honour to be allowed into another world and decides to concentrate on her wonderful trip.

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Profiles of Workshop Presenters

John Eames

I have taught English Language and Literature in schools, sixth-form colleges and at Huddersfield University, along the way reaching the dizzying heights of Vice Principal of Oldham Sixth Form College.

Most significant in terms of *The Magic Makers* was my time as Head of Department at Pendleton College in Salford, the largest centre nationally for the new English Language A Level for several years. One element of the writing assessment was Writing for Children – a creative process enhanced by the study of child language development.

Guided by the principle that if you can't do it you shouldn't teach it, I increasingly focused my own joy in writing upon children's stories and poetry – eventually publishing *Beastly Bites*. The accompanying *Teachers' Notes*, closely linked to the National Literacy Strategy of the time, made this a popular text in local schools.

Poetically ambitious, *The Magic Makers* waited for a number of years for an illustrator who would be as attentive to its natural imagery as Kim Gay had been to the humour of *Beastly Bites*. An extensive exploration of illustrators on the internet eventually brought me into contact with Nicola Dennis, whose subtle use of colour and brilliant evocation of the wonders of nature made her the ideal artist.

I continue to write stories and poems for children. My book, *The Boy with Four Hats*, is an imagined narrative of what inspired Dickens to write *Oliver Twist*. The latest publication, *Leafcutter*, has been written as a commission for Clive Farrell, whom *The Independent* dubbed 'Lord of the Butterflies'. He co-owns two butterfly farms and has worked tirelessly to preserve butterfly species. His Butterfly Farm in Stratford-upon-Avon houses a large colony of leafcutter ants.

An important source of inspiration is the family next door, whose two daughters receive their own story or poem every birthday and Christmas. I hope to publish some of these in two separate anthologies in a year's time.

Jackie Eames

I taught English Language and Literature in schools and colleges from 1979 until 2014 when I retired from Executive Headship at Batley Girls' High School. Whilst working with John at Pendleton College I spent a year's sabbatical at North Cheshire College developing resources for the English Language A Level for which I was a Chief Examiner. I co-wrote a successful textbook *Your Own Words*. Much of the content it covered is now incorporated in of KS2 SPAG tests surprisingly!

I was Head of English at the transformational Sixth Form College at Oldham – another shared venture with John – but returned to schools in 1998 as Curriculum Deputy and then Head Teacher in different 11-18 Secondary Schools. My last school's results went from 29% 5 A-C

to 99.5 % during my tenure and we achieved Outstanding across all aspects in our 2013 inspection.

Since 'retiring' I have done a lot of consultancy work, creating a through school from three underperforming Infant, Primary and Secondary schools. I work with a large Teaching School Alliance in Bradford and am Chair of Trustees in a MAT of 6 primary schools. I badge and deploy Specialist Leaders in Education with a particular emphasis on literacy and school improvement but the work I enjoy most is doing classroom based workshops and teacher and leader training.

Nicola Dennis

My main passions in life are the written word, art, nature, photography and my family.

I graduated from Edinburgh College of Art with an honours degree in Art and Design, having majored in Glass and Silversmithing.

I went on to set up two successful businesses which I ran in tandem:

Shots Picture Services where I became the principal industrial photographer for *Bradstone* and ECC Quarries. My work was used for much of their advertising material and I ran a photographic stock library on their behalves.

In Depth Design which was a glass engraving business supplying both industry and individuals with unique pieces of art. The pinnacle of this part of my career was supplying four large individually engraved windows for an award-winning garden at the Chelsea Flower Show.

Following the birth of my children I put my artistic career on hold to be a creative mum.

As they grew up I gained various qualifications in computer graphics which I now put to good use in the book layouts that I do for **In Depth Design Publications**.

In recent years my artistic aspirations have moved from glass to painting and illustrating. I have been featured in magazines for my silk painting prowess and I have produced two children's books for Dorset Wildlife Trust using these techniques. *Bizzy the Blenny* and *Jolly the Oystercatcher* have both been well received.

My illustrative work for John has focused mainly on the use of coloured crayons because I wanted to show children that they could produce fun pictures with the minimum of inexpensive materials.

The Magic Makers was seen and appreciated by Mr Clive Farrell who then commissioned *Leafcutter* for the Butterfly Farm at Stratford upon Avon.

I hold at least one annual exhibition of larger pieces of artwork that I produce for my own pleasure using various materials including, oils, acrylics, silks and graphite where I am fortunate enough to both sell and win awards.

Rhyming couplets by children in Year 6.

My favourite creature is a scary lion.
He's the one you need to keep your eye on!

My fav'rite flower is an anemone
With inside black and petals lemony.

My favourite creature is a cheetah
Whose tail is longer than a metre

My favourite flower is a damask rose
I love to wear one when I pose!

Artwork produced during a Year 6 Workshop

