‘Snow Friends’ Talk for Writing Project – notes for Parents.

This term I was going to embark upon our first ‘Talk for Writing’ project. This is a very basic outline of the process, and if you could give it a go with your child, that would be amazing …

Talk for Writing was developed by Pie Corbett. The official website, should you wish to learn more, can be found at: <https://www.talk4writing.co.uk> The basic principle behind it is that: ‘It enables children to imitate the language they need for a particular topic orally, before reading and analysing it, and then writing their own version.’

In other words, children learn a story so that they have the tools and framework to create their own ‘version’ of it. At Reception level we are not expecting the children to ‘write’ a story, but to engage in activities that develop their vocabulary around the text, and to create and draw their own version.

To get started with the ‘Imitation Phase’, read the story ‘Snow Friends’ a couple of times with your child (this text is printed in the Packs, and is also available on YouTube). Once they are familiar with the text, encourage your child to make up some actions to go with the story. Whatever actions they come up with are great, there is no right or wrong – the point is that the actions will help your child to remember and ‘learn’ the story.

A fun Talk 4 Writing game to play is ‘Story Tennis’, simply throw a ball between yourselves, and each time you catch the ball you have to tell the next line or two of Snow Friends. It’s a fun way to remember and recall the story.

You could also play at interviewing your child as though they are Little Bear, and vice versa, with questions such as ‘how did Little Bear feel at the start of the story, and how did he feel at the end of story?’, and ‘how did Little Bear feel when he met Otter and Rabbit?’

Once your child is familiar with the story and can recall the basic elements of it independently, they are ready to draw a Story Map. This is basically just representing the main elements of Snow Friends in pictorial form (a story map can be as simple as a series of pictures drawn in order upon a line).

In class, we would be learning to break the story down in to separate areas, which are Story opening / beginning (Little Bear wakes from his sleep), Setting the Scene (snow!), The Problem (Little Bear is lonely), The Resolution (he meets Otter and Rabbit), and the Conclusion, (everyone has a friend now, even the snowman!). If you can, jot these titles down on a whiteboard or paper and encourage your child to discuss each area whilst writing beneath each title, or with you acting as scribe.

Next, we move on to the ‘Innovation Phase’ – this is where we encourage your child to make changes to the original story of Snow Friends. The easiest way to do this is to change the kind of animals that Little Bear meets. This then lends itself to you and your child engaging in independent research of animals that live in snowy climes, such as Arctic Animals (he might meet a walrus or a polar bear). Another nice and simple extension activity is to include some Art, and to sketch pictures of the animals that your child has chosen. You could extend this activity further by asking your child to describe each animal, helping them to write these adjectives down, or encouraging them to ‘sound out’ whilst you scribe for them.

I have included in the Packs some images of a snowy landscape and a snowman, please use these images to encourage you child to brainstorm fantastic descriptive words, which you can scribe onto the paper around the image, or perhaps your child is ready to write some of the words themselves …

Once your child has brainstormed adjectives, researched and learnt enough about each new animal, he / she is ready for …

… The ‘Invention phase’ – this is where your child will create and even possibly write their own ‘version’ of the story. Once your child can tell you the 2 (or more) new friends that Little Bear is going to meet, they are ready to draw the story as a Story Map. Your child is free to make as many changes as they wish, beyond the ‘new friends’, so, for example, the friends might make a snow bear instead of a snowman! Some children might be super imaginative, and even make big changes, such as putting the animals on the moon and making the ‘snowman’ out of moon dust! Again, there is no right or wrong.

Once your child has drawn their story, encourage them to tell it to you and your family as a show, to which you could all make accompanying actions! Your child could make small puppets on lolly sticks to tell his or her story to you. The story could even be acted out and filmed on an Ipad!

Finally, and although this is not expected at all at Reception level, some of the children might want to even write a sentence to accompany their pictures. This would be fantastic and well above what is expected of them. In class however, I would be super happy with the above, and would not expect sentences. The story maps, brainstorms, and research would take at least 2, if not 3 weeks in class, alongside everything else, so please take your time, enjoy ‘learning’ the story with your child, and enjoy helping them to create their own version of it.

Miss Davies ☺