



my homeschool

Exploring Stories

By Jo Lloyd

Exploring Stories – Year 7

Written by Jo Lloyd

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Introduction for Parents

This resource has been developed to guide your child to explore both reading and writing stories. Drawing on Greek and Nordic myths, Charles Dickens, J.R.R. Tolkien, William Shakespeare, C.S. Lewis and other authors, your child will read some great literature and learn the technical aspects of creative writing.

There are two lessons each week over an eight week term. The first lesson is a narration and the second lesson is an exercise in creating writing, inspired by an example of literature. On the odd numbered weeks of term your child will give an oral narration and on the even numbered weeks they will give a written narration. Your student will be able to work independently through most of these lessons, but you will need to be available to take their oral narrations.

An examination option is provided for week nine if you wish to use it. Using a story starter, it is designed to give your child an opportunity to pull together the various elements of writing they have practiced through the term. It can be used as an additional writing exercise in lieu of an examination.

Unlike their mathematics program, right and wrong answers to help assess your child are not provided here, with the exception of guidance for Lesson 6 (see note below). You will need to read through and assess the work being produced by your child. When assessing their work and progress consider factors such as:

- ❖ Are they capturing most of the major details in their narrations?
- ❖ Do their narrations accurately reflect the chronology of events?
- ❖ Are they using appropriate sentence structure for written narrations?
- ❖ The quality and variety of their vocabulary
- ❖ Do they include few or many details in their creative writing?
- ❖ Is their writing becoming a little more sophisticated?
- ❖ Can they tell the difference between the three different points of view in writing?
- ❖ Is their writing interesting to read?

In addition to these, you may find that at times you need to address spelling, punctuation and grammatical issues too. When discussing these elements with your child it can be helpful to be positive in your approach: it can be hard to think up a story! You may even like to do one of the writing exercises with your child and share what you wrote. Do encourage them to also consider how their writing can be further improved (without too many red pen corrections!). If they do feel discouraged, remind them how many reviews and edits are required for every book and that this is a part of writing that every author has to do. Another helpful approach is the “before” and “after” approach: Look at the quality of their writing before any edits and reviews and how much it improved after those edits and reviews were made.

I suggest that for the first lesson you read through the Introduction to the Student together with your child and then take the first oral narration. Take this as an opportunity to also chat about using a Commonplace Book.

A Commonplace Book is a notebook to record snippets of writing one has read. It serves as a personalised reading diary where sections of other people’s writing is included. Charlotte Mason encouraged students to keep one, writing: “*we never forget the book that we have made*”

extracts from, and of which we have taken the trouble to write a short review." I have kept a Commonplace Book for many years and use it to record many different notes from my reading: quotes I liked, sections of dialogue, descriptive passages, parts of speeches, a character sketch, recipes, and plant species, depending on the books I am reading. These books provide a useful record of my reading history and the practice of recording (narration) does help me to remember the details. I prefer to use lined notebooks with sturdy covers.

A Note on Lesson 6

Lesson 6 examines the plot of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, asking your child to examine the plot and identify the villain. In case you need a recap:

The golden-haired Goldilocks is taking a walk in the woods when she comes to a cottage. She knocks on the door and when nobody answers Goldilocks lets herself in. Being hungry, she samples the three bowls of porridge left on the table. One is too hot, another too cold, but the last is "just right" so she eats it all up. She then proceeds to the lounge room and tries the three chairs. Of these, one is "just right" and Goldilocks sits on it, promptly breaking it. Goldilocks then ventures upstairs to try the three beds on offer (one too hard, one too soft, and one "just right"). The "just right bed" is so comfortable that she falls asleep.

As Goldilocks is sleeping, the family of three bears return to their cottage. They find their porridge has been sampled with one bowl consumed; chairs tried, and one broken; and go upstairs to find a golden-haired intruder still sleeping in Baby Bear's bed. Baby Bear's shouts of surprise awaken Goldilocks and she runs downstairs and out of the house.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears is a great fairy tale for this exercise of summarising a plot. Your child will probably correctly identify the conflict in the plot as being young Goldilocks entering the house without the bears knowing, with tension rising as she samples the porridge and moves through the house. The climax of the story occurs when the bears return home. It is from this point that the story turns: sleeping Goldilocks is discovered by Baby Bear and the tension of the story is resolved as Goldilocks runs from the house never to return.

This exercise is designed to be somewhat playful, giving your child an opportunity to explore a story children know well but may not have "analysed" as such. Be warned though: your child may be amused by the inconsistencies (how could porridge all placed out at the same time be such different temperatures?) and question Goldilocks' manners (who walks into a stranger's home, eats their food, tries their furniture and sleeps in their beds?). You may have some interesting conversations about the golden-haired girl being the villain of the story too!

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Introduction for Students

Could you even guess the number of books you have read? Think of all the picture books you were read as a small child, the beginner books and novels you have read since then. What are you reading now? Do you have favourite authors or genres that you scour the shelves of your local library or bookshops for?

Over the course of one term we will look at creative writing and you will practice doing some creative writing of your own. Each week comprises of two lessons. In the first lesson you will read an excerpt of a story that someone has written. Many of these are mythological tales, weaving stories from ancient times. After enjoying reading these excerpts you will then provide a written or oral narration, summarising the key elements of the portion you have read.

The second lesson of each week focuses on different technical aspects of creative writing and shows how these have been crafted in a number of different stories. You will read a short excerpt from an excellent book demonstrating the aspect being examined for that week. After this there is a short discussion and explanation of this feature of language and then it is your turn to write. You will have the opportunity to craft short sections of dialogue, develop characters, settings and try your hand at writing from different points of view. I encourage you to enjoy this and see how well you can write to create colourful and vivid snippets of stories many people would love to read.

Please keep all the different portions you have written together. Seeing all that you have written and accomplished is an important aspect of writing. Books have been written by words, sentences, paragraphs and chapters all coming together to tell a tale. It is the same with your writing: it will come incrementally and it is wonderful to see your progress.

It has been said that the best way to become a writer is to write. Indeed! The more you write the better you will become. The more fabulous books you read the wider your vocabulary becomes and you become familiar with different writing styles and plots. You might come across a funny portion of dialogue in a book you are reading and want to copy it or use it as a model to play around with in a story of your own. You may come across a word you do not yet know the meaning of. Take the time to write the word down and find out its meaning. You may like to use that word in your own writing. You may be keeping, or wish to start, a Commonplace Book. A Commonplace Book is like a reading diary. It is a book to record passages from different books you have read, whether it is jotting down some fantastically witty lines of dialogue from a novel, a snippet of poetry, keep a summary of a plot from a book, or to include an inspirational quote. This is a fantastic place to keep such thoughts and examples of writing you enjoy together in one place, and is likely to become a most treasured possession.

Keep reading the rich stories other authors have gifted us with and please try to write your own stories. You never know where they may end up. My brother and I howl with laughter over the little book I made for him when he was a small child. It features a little (pink!) rabbit travelling to the moon and rather rudimentary drawings. It was not great writing, but it was made with much love and has entertained him and I more than my younger self could ever have imagined.

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Week 1

Lesson 1 - Oral Narration

In this lesson you will give an oral narration from the legendary gods of Ancient Greece. It is an excerpt from *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire about Athena and Arachne.

An oral narration summarises the key points of the passage, telling back the passage in your own words. Ask someone to listen to your narration.



Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was the favourite child of Zeus. She had sprung fully grown out of her father's head.

Her mother was Metis, goddess of prudence, the first wife of Zeus. He depended on her, for he needed her wise council, but Mother Earth warned him that, were Metis to bear him a son, this son would dethrone him as Zeus had dethroned Cronus, his father who had dethroned his own father, Uranus. This must not happen, thought Zeus, but he could not do without her advice, so he decided to swallow her. Slyly, he proposed that they play a game of changing shapes, and Metis, forgetting her prudence, playfully turned herself into all kinds of animals, big and small. Just as she had taken on the shape of a little fly, Zeus opened wide his mouth, took a deep breath, and zip! He swallowed the fly. Ever after, Metis stayed in his head and guided him from there.

Now it happened that Metis was going to have a daughter, and she sat inside Zeus's head hammering out a helmet and weaving a splendid robe for the coming child. Soon Zeus began to suffer from pounding headaches and cried out in agony. All the gods came running to help him, and skilled Hephaestus grasped his tools and split open his father's skull. Out sprang Athena, wearing the robe and the helmet, her grey eyes flashing. Thunder roared and the gods stood in awe.

Athena's constant companion was Nike, the spirit of victory. With Nike at her side, Athena led armies, but only those that fought for just causes. In time of peace she stood beside the artists of Greece and taught them the fine and useful arts. She had great pride in her own skills at the loom and the potter's wheel, but was happy to see her pupils excel as long as they showed her proper respect.

One of her pupils was Arachne, a simple country girl, who was wonderfully skilled at the loom. People came from far and wide to admire her weavings. Stupidly she boasted that she had learned nothing from Athena; indeed, that she was better than the goddess!

That hurt Athena's pride. Disguised as an old woman, she went to the girl and tried to talk some sense into her.

"Your work is beautiful," she said, "but why compare yourself with the gods? Why not be contented to be the best among mortals?"

“Let the goddess Athena herself come and measure her skill against mine,” Arachne answered haughtily.

Angrily Athena threw off her disguise and stood before the girl in all her glory.

“Vain girl,” she said, “you may have your wish. Sit down at your loom and let us compete.”

Athena wove the most beautiful tapestry ever seen, every thread and knot was perfect and the colours sparkled. It pictured the Olympian gods in all their glory and majesty.

Arachne’s tapestry was also beautifully woven; Athena herself had to admit that the girl’s craftsmanship was flawless. But what kind of a picture had she woven? An irreverent scene making fun of Zeus and his wives!

In a wrath the goddess tore the tapestry to shreds and struck the girl with the shuttle. Immediately Arachne felt her head shrink almost to nothing, her nimble fingers changed into long, spindly legs. Athena had turned her into a spider.

“Vain glorious girl, go on and spin your thread and weave your empty net forever,” said Athena to Arachne, the spider. Athena was a just goddess and she could be very stern. She knew that the gods were great only as long as they were properly worshiped by mortals.

Now you have read the excerpt, go and tell someone what you remember of this story.

Lesson 2 - Setting

They left the high-road by a well-remembered lane and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weather-cock surmounted cupola on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were overrun with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state within; for, entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle light and not too much to eat.

Excerpt from *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens



Consider the scene that is set in the above passage. The details allow the reader to imagine this place in their mind, from the sights, to the smells and sounds, perhaps even to the touch (of dust and dank dirt). When writing creatively, you need to set up where the story is taking place: the setting. If, like this part of the Dickens novel, your setting is within a house or home, you need to write about the features of the building. If your story is taking place within a city, a country town, the bush or in outer space, you need to include these details so the reader can imagine the place where it is set.

Your Turn

Choose a setting to write about. This might be a cafe, a bookshop, a picnic area by the lake, a mountain stream, or a town hall packed with people to attend a public meeting. Pick a place where you will have plenty of details to include about what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and perhaps taste. Once you have chosen a setting, jot down some notes about this setting, perhaps using key words, mind mapping or even drawing an illustration to prompt your thoughts. Alternatively, find a photograph of a place in a book or magazine and describe the setting.

Now prepare a written description of your chosen setting. Include at least five sentences in your description and add as much detail as you can to make the place come alive for the reader. Then share what you wrote with someone else. Enjoy!