



A Creative Toolkit for Libraries

Imaginative Spaces



The 'Non-Fiction Challenge' toolkit

Introduction:

The idea of the non-fiction challenge is to use the library's reference resources in an imaginative way, offering themed participatory sessions to schools. The challenge sessions encourage speaking and listening as well as research skills which make them attractive to schools. Schools respond to this skill development and the fact the challenge uses good old fashioned books, not computers.

The sessions were developed at Southfields library as part of a programme of schools workshops, delivered on Thursdays when the library was otherwise closed to the public.

What follows is a breakdown of the structure of the sessions. Two stories created for the sessions are included, making them easy to replicate. Alternatively by following the structure bespoke sessions can be created which should be easily deliverable by any experienced or confident story teller or drama worker.

The non-fiction challenge: a step by step guide.

1. Pre-visit

Ideally, liaise with target schools to highlight a topic which will connect with their curriculum and schedule of work. This must be something which can be supported by adequate book stock. (The two different sessions created at Southfields were about Nocturnal Animals (KS1) and Landmarks (KS2)

Additional stock may then need to be ordered to support the challenge. Ideally a range of age appropriate texts, roughly equivalent to one book per participant.

The key to the session is the creative 'provocation' which sets the challenge. This might be a story told in character, or drama scene with a 'hook', an un-finished ending. The children

are set the task of finding out some information to inform a satisfactory conclusion. So, for example, in the nocturnal animals session, the story concerns a boy who loves animals, but can't sleep due to frightening night-time noises. He doesn't know that many animals are nocturnal, and it is those sounds that are keeping him awake. The children research different nocturnal animals, report back to the boy, or to the storyteller on behalf of the boy, and so effect a satisfactory conclusion to the story.

The two stories created for Southfields are included here.

2. The Day of the visit

A few minutes are needed before the class arrive to organise the space. To obviate the problem of everyone having to crowd around one or two shelves of books, arrange some stock on a central table or specific area.

3. The session plan

- a. Welcome and introductions- it sounds obvious but teachers evaluations from these sessions highlighted the importance of the welcome. Some of the children were nervous about visiting a library. How does a library work? Is anyone a member? Explain that today we have a challenge- a story challenge.
- b. Look around time- children can explore the library and the books. Again, evaluations revealed the strength of the fact that classes did not need to be hushed or too tightly controlled. What kinds of books do you like?
- c. (Optional) Gather them in middle- explain that they will have to use their voices and make some decisions later. To test them in this we will play a game... The class are brought together for a focussing game or exercise- (The preferences game explained fully here)
- d. Then gather back together in children's area for the story. The story should be told in role if possible, or at least developing a strong sense of the central character. The trick is to develop a character who needs help with something...
- e. The story ends but is not complete. The class are enlisted to help. They must take 15minutes or so to discover some facts and prepare one to bring back to the storyteller/ character. What kinds of books do we need to find? How do we look for information? What kinds of books do we not need?
- f. The children then feedback to the character/storyteller what they have learnt.
- g. After feedback- questions and discussion. These can be anything that help to reinforce the impact of the session and the learning
What do you advise the character to do? What skills have we used today?
(e.g.)What would it be like if you were nocturnal?
- h. (optional) Finally, a vote. Stress that this must be your choice - don't just copy friends. Would you prefer to be nocturnal, or not?
- i. For the last ten minutes the children have time to choose a book or further exploration time

4. The Preferences game

This is just one example of a physical fun game which can be used, if there is enough space in the library, to energise and focus the class before they sit and hear the story. The idea is to encourage children to develop an opinion and think about it, in a fun and non-challenging way.

The whole thing should not outstay its welcome- about 10 minutes will do.

- a. Begin with a single file line of children down the middle of the space. The leader calls out two options and each person has to run, or jump if there is less room, to one side or the other depending on what they prefer.

So, the leader might say: "If you prefer crisps, jump right- if you prefer chocolate, jump left"

(The leader can decide whether to allow an undecided or no-preference option, in which case they must stay in the line in the middle.)

- b. Everyone then returns to the middle , and the next options are given.
"if you prefer cats, jump right, or dogs, jump left."

Other ideas 'Frozen' or 'Tangled'
 Love football or hate football
 Spaghetti or rice
 One Direction or whoever else is popular at that moment....

- c. Then introduce some slightly less obvious choices, eg

Being at school or staying at home
Time on your own or time with friends
Being quiet or being noisy

- d. After each of these, ask people why they have chosen the preference. it's good to praise anyone in a minority who has not given in to the temptation of jumping across to the larger group!

5. Sample Story One 'Nocturnal Animals'

Included here as an example. The story was used for Year 2- age 6-7. I told the story partially in role, using a teddy bear as a prop but nothing else.

There once was a boy, about your age. He was called... well, what was he called, do you think? (They suggest names)

OK, let's call him that. There once was a boy, about your age, called (Billy).

(Billy) was a normal little boy, he had a normal sort of life, he lived in a normal sort of house, with a normal sort of Mum and Dad. Cousin Kevin was a bit strange, he collected bogies and bus tickets... but that's not important right now, the story's not about him.

(Billy) was just the normal amount of brave. Brave enough to go to the dentist. Brave enough, last year, to join year 1. Brave enough- well what else might you need to be brave for? (They suggest things) Exactly. brave enough for all of that.

But there was one time when he was not quite as brave. Bedtime.

(Billy) didn't really like the dark. Well, not so much the dark, as the noises that he heard after dark. Noises that he never seemed to hear during the day.

Sometimes it was OK. Sometimes he would be so tired that he would fall fast asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow... (Pretend to fall asleep. Snore. They may shout- wake with a start)

But usually... night time sounds scared him to death. He would lie in bed and wait for them. Sounds like- what? a ghost? Whoo, whoo... A ghost in the garden? He would tremble with fear.

His trusted bear Bonzo helped a bit. Sometimes he would lie and press Bonzo to one ear, press the other to the pillow and try and shut them out. But even Bonzo couldn't make the noises stop.

Some nights, he would hear a shriek or a yelp- what was it? A monster? Pirates? A pirate with a noisy parrot come to steal his moneybox?

Some nights, scurrying and shuffling outside his bedroom window. (they copy scuffling noise) Something in the garden? But what? What could it be? Goblins? Pixies? Tiny trolls?

In the mornings, everything seemed fine, he might say to his Mum or dad 'I heard a ghost last night', but even as he said it, it sounded kind of wrong, and dad would just ruffle his hair and say 'You and your imagination!'. They didn't take it seriously. And every day, he would tell himself that tonight he would not be scared. But once the light was out, the noises would come again- it seemed that the very darkness made the noises seem louder. Hoots, yelps, rustlings, shrieks, flutters, flaps.

(Billy) was scared because he did not know what the noises were.

Do you know what the noises might be? (They suggest nocturnal animals, possibly among other things)

Unlike you, (Billy) simply did not know that some animals come out at night- that they live at night and sleep in the day. What do we call that? Nocturnal. He did not know that some animals were nocturnal. Now (Billy) liked animals, a lot, if he had known that he would not have been scared, even of the loudest sounds...

So- at this point of the story, (Billy) needs your help. Can you help him? If you can find out some facts about Nocturnal animals, and bring them back to him, he won't be scared anymore...

6. Sample story Two: landmarks

This story was used for years 4 and 5. I told it adopting the persona of a typical film-noir detective, American accent, coat and hat.

The name's Borrows. Lester Borrows. I'm an intergalactic detective. I work for Borrows Universal Mystery Solvers- or BUMS, for short. (Produces business card- B.U.M.S) Yeah that's right, I'm a Bum. Hey and if you play your cards right you could all be BUMS too.

So I was sitting in my office minding my own business when this dame came in. She had green skin, three heads with six eyes in each one and she left a trail of slime wherever she slid. My, she was a fine looking woman.

I looked her straight in the eye.. and the other eye... and the other eye, well you get the idea of that- and asked her what she wanted.

She said 'oolaboolallareeuuurrgr'. Turns out she was from Alpha Centauri. Luckily I'm fluent in Alpha Centaurian, Martian, Klingon and French. What she said translated as 'turn on the radio', So I did. (Soundfile with the following text is included)

"remarkable news today from Pisa, in Italy- the leaning tower of Pisa, one of the worlds most famous landmarks has completely disappeared. Vanished into thin air. Eye witnesses report seeing an object shooting into the sky at night, which could have been the centuries old tower, but if so, this is a remarkable phenomenon. How can a famous landmark, a huge building like that just disappear? How could a stone tower take off into the sky? Local police are baffled. We spoke to British Tourist John Boring. "it's disgraceful. I come all the way over here to see the leaning tower of Pisa and its just disappeared. How can you lose a tower? I mean-"

The leaning tower of Pisa had disappeared? Clearly something was a foot.(Points to own foot) This. But as to the mystery of the disappearing tower. The Alpha centauri lady told me it was down to a gang of Martian criminals. More thefts were planned. Apparently the martians were going to steal loads more of earths great landmarks and ransom them back to us earthlings at huge cost. But which ones? She said she was giving me this lead so I could do something about it. What lead, I said, I don't have a dog- oh yeah I get it. Imagine that, i could be known as the man who saved the world's famous landmarks. Alright, the man and the green-skinned three headed alien slime lady who saved the worlds landmarks. Think of the fame, the glory, the film rights, the little action figures with detachable accessories...

But I needed help- I didn't know anything about landmarks. I called the (Holy Cross) knowledge Centre. (pick up phone)Send me about twenty five of your best researchers. .. (Enlist class to help him gather information about the world's landmarks. What is a landmark? Any examples? What kind of things make a landmark stand out? Oldest? Tallest? Historically significant? etc)

In the Southfields sessions, participants used a range of texts, from junior atlases and 'about countries' texts to adult travel guides and travel literature. These sessions ended with the debating question 'are landmarks important?'

7. Feedback

Evaluations for the session from teachers suggest not only that the structure works well, but that the skills developed are relevant to them in their own practice.

“The children really enjoyed the research activity and the debating game was an excellent idea to get children thinking for themselves. I might pinch that idea for lessons! I was also pleased that the visit was all based on books and thought it was a great idea to not have the PCs on during the visit.”

“The children were buzzing off the visit when we got back to school! 3 children had also already read their books and returned them back to me and asked if we could go again!”

“Because it was all centred around a purpose (the aliens stealing the landmarks), even the most reluctant learners were busy searching for books and facts. The books on the central table were really helpful, as those unfamiliar with a library could still find facts.”

“As soon as the children got back to school, they wanted to start reading the books they had borrowed from the library. There was a real buzz as pupils shared books with their friends and talked about what they could borrow next time.”

8. Images

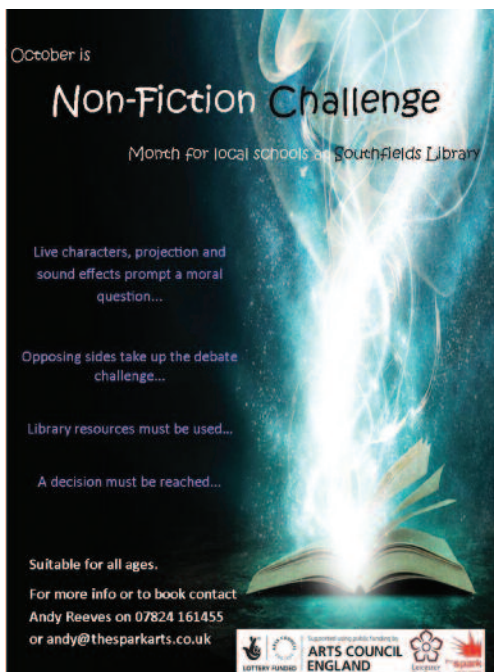
School and Library staff help with research.



The Central table became a research station...



Flyer advertising the sessions



9. Contact

For any queries or advice about mounting a Non-Fiction Challenge in a library setting, contact Andy Reeves, Artist in Residence, Imaginative Spaces programme: andy@thesparkarts.co.uk