

## GRANNY SARAH AND THE LAST RED KITE (classroom activities)

Malachy Doyle and Petra Brown

### 1. Getting under the skin of the story

Because this is a picture book, the children need to be aware of the different roles of the writer and the illustrator. Initially, of course, it's just important to read and enjoy the story, pausing to allow children to comment on the characters and their actions, and predict what is likely to happen next. When re-reading the story together, use 'think bubbles' to record what the characters are thinking at different points. Use 'speech bubbles' to record what else they might say. The bubbles can be pre-cut out of paper and stored for future reference or laminated and reused. *Granny Sarah* is quite a complicated story because it has flashbacks to the distant past (when red kites were a common sight on the streets of London) and the fairly recent past (when they had dwindled to just one breeding pair). It might be helpful to distinguish between a distant time 'long, long ago', the remembered past 'when Granny was young', and the present 'today'. Children might like to classify some of the episodes in the story by saying whether they relate to 'long, long ago', 'when Granny was young', or 'today'.

### 2. Favourite places and favourite sights

Lowri has a favourite place in the whole world, a favourite sight and a favourite story. There are lots of possibilities here for children to discuss where they best like to be and what they best like to see. This lends itself to simple photographic work or illustration and would be an ideal project for the computer. With help, children could import the photo of their favourite place with simple text.

My favourite place in all the world is \_\_\_\_\_.

It is special because \_\_\_\_\_.

In my favourite place I can see \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. Telling stories

Lowri's favourite story is one which her grandmother has told her time after time. No doubt the children in your class have stories which they love to hear again and again. An extended project on story telling could focus on structuring and telling stories for an audience, using appropriate story language and remembering to include a satisfying level of detail. One way of initiating the project might be for the teacher or group leader to tell a story in the first person (maybe Granny Sarah's story) – just the bare bones – and allow the children to ask for the additional detail. When the children's questions are analysed, it will be clear that they are asking for more detail about the following areas:

WHO (the characters in the story: what they looked like, how they sounded)

WHERE (the setting for the story, how it looked, sounded and felt)

WHAT (exactly what happened in the story, the sequence of events)

WHEN (information about the passage of time, e.g. 'next morning')  
WHY or HOW (characters' motives – why did they behave in the way they did)

A question hand – with each of these areas assigned to a finger – is a very useful way to remember the range of questions children might ask.

*Granny Sarah and the last Red Kite* is a picture book, not an oral story, even though this is what Granny Sarah herself related to Lowri. The **Who** and **Where** questions are answered for us in the pictures. The children need to be aware that Malachy Doyle, the author, gives Granny a voice and Petra Brown, the illustrator, shows us what Granny could see (and what she is now storing in her mind's eye).

There are a number of ways in which the project could proceed: one would be to ask the children to interview family members and then to retell their stories in a story circle with the other children asking questions (supported by a question hand) to elicit as much detail as possible; another possibility is to rely on the children's personal anecdotes within a story circle; a third possibility is to invite members of the community to come into school and retell a story from their own childhood. The guests would, in effect, be taking on the role of Granny Sarah, and their stories could then be retold, recorded onto disk and rewritten by the children, either individually or on a group / class basis. Five guests, invited into the story circle on different occasions, would provide five groups of children with a story each.

#### 4. **The story of a book**

How a book is made is a story all in itself and should be linked, for the children, with practical book-making activities. Developing the community stories outlined above could be linked with an account of how the picture book *Granny Sarah* was created. Although this isn't always the case with picture books, Malachy Doyle wrote the text first – and had already split it up into sections for the individual pages. Ask the children to count how many pages actually contain a piece of the story (5-29). Ask them what else the book contains? Is it all story?

Ask the children to look at a variety of picture books to see where the story starts – many, but by no means all, will start on the right hand side of the page. There is always a title page preceding the story, always an acknowledgements page (which often has a dedication) and sometimes 'endpapers' – decorative pages at either or both ends of the book. The presence of 'endpapers' will depend how on long the story is and how much space is left for decoration. Occasionally there will be a page containing other material, for example factual information. (Strictly speaking there are only endpapers in a hardback book because they are used to make the bridge between the cover and the inside pages.)

Finding the right illustrator is not always an easy task. Not every illustrator suits every book. To show this to the children, play the game of 'find the

picture'. This will help in the discussion which follows. Ask the children to find the picture:

- ❖ which shows a detailed image of a red kite or kites;
- ❖ which shows the love between Granny Sarah and Lowri;
- ❖ which shows the red kites flying in the mountains;
- ❖ which shows the boy falling out of the tree.

The publishers had to search high and low for an illustrator for *Granny Sarah and the last Red Kite*. It had to be somebody who could show action, paint landscapes and wildlife accurately and also show the relationship between characters. Ask the children why all these skills were important. Guide them back to the pictures they chose in the 'find the picture' game.

Petra Brown, who specialises in painting landscapes, agreed to do the pictures and the publisher suggested what might go into each one based on the story chunks which Malachy Doyle had written. Petra asked questions about when the story took place so that she could decide what kind of 'look' to give Granny Sarah and her cottage. What sort of granny is she? What kind of home does she live in? Is she like the children's grandmothers?

Petra had to decide what kind of colours to use. Ask the children to pick out the range of colours she chose to illustrate the story (known technically as the colour palette). Make a large colour chart:

WHITE  
YELLOW  
RED  
PURPLE  
BLUE  
GREEN  
BROWN

Flick through the pages and make a tally of the different colours used. This will give the children an idea of Petra's colour palette. They will need to make decisions about colour when they create their own books.

#### 5. **Storyboarding**

On a group basis make a detailed storyboard with the children for their own 'Granny Sarah' stories, showing what is going to happen (including which picture) is going to appear on each page. (This could be an 8, 16 or 32 page book, depending on the children's ability.) They will need to plan for a real book with endpapers, a title page and an acknowledgements page with a dedication. If appropriate, encourage them to include an information page. It should be emphasised that this is a plan only and therefore they do **not** need to actually prepare the pictures at this stage, just decide what they are going to show.

#### 6. **Information Finding**

Stress to the children the importance of providing accurate information if you are writing a book. There is information in the story and at the end of the

book. Where did this information come from? Emphasise how authors have to research their facts carefully, consulting books and authorities such as the RSPB to make sure that they are accurate. The RSPB website: <http://www.rspb.org.uk> contains an excellent children's area, but which would need to be mediated by an adult. An information site accessible directly by Y2 children is the Infant Explorer site *Sebastian Swan* <http://www.sebastianswan.org.uk>

#### 7. **A visitors' centre**

Ideally the reading of the story will be accompanied by a visit to a nature reserve or red kite feeding station, such as the ones at Gigrin (Rhayader), Bwlch Nant yr Arian (Aberystwyth), Llangadog and Tregaron. This will give the children a real insight into studying birds in the wild. After the visit, there are lots of possible developments; a very active way to bring home the fact that wildlife is all around us is to establish a visitors' centre in the classroom, with maps, annotated trails, spotter guides and information about birds based on the local school environment. (This might in itself be part of a whole school initiative to make the environment more bird friendly.) The children's experience should involve active engagement with the environment, being involved in the siting and maintenance of bird boxes and feeders. There should be a range of first hand experiences, including observing, using binoculars and checking observations against simple spotter guides. Within the visitors' centre, books, leaflets and downloads from the internet should be supplemented by the children's own work. A simple framework should be developed for the format of an identification leaflet for different bird species.

Roles can be assigned within the visitors' centre which can be as simple or elaborate as the classroom (or teacher) can accommodate. An office and shop (and possibly a café) area can extend the children's pleasure and involvement and offer a variety of roles as well as experience in handling money. In the office there should be a phone and events diary for taking bookings. Talks may be given by 'experts' within the centre, both from inside and outside the classroom. Signage should be bilingual and children should be ready to at least meet and greet their visitors bilingually. Parents and other visitors should be invited to the official opening and encouraged to visit (at the teacher's discretion).

The setting up of the centre can only happen after a visit to a real visitors' centre when, with the aid of photos, a list can be made of all the things which make up a good experience for the visitor.

#### 8. **Other texts**

Role play activities of this kind will tend to generate a natural need for a range of texts. These are just some of the possibilities for text-led activities based on *Granny Sarah and the last Red Kite*. Do remember that every time you ask children to create a text, they **must** have opportunities to study a real-life example, simplified if necessary, in such a way that they become familiar with the key features of structure and language.

- ❖ Letter of apology. The boy writes back to Granny Sarah, apologising for trying to steal the red kite's eggs.

- ❖ Letter of thanks to the wildlife reserve.
- ❖ Letters to author and illustrator.
- ❖ Advertisements for the classroom visitor centre.
- ❖ News report based on the red kite rescue.
- ❖ Rules for keeping the countryside safe.
- ❖ Lifecycle information about the red kite or other birds.