

Plot, character and setting

SECTION

4

Variety of textual structures

Objective: To explore how different texts appeal to readers through varied sentence structures and descriptive language.

What you need: Copies of *Matilda*, writing materials.

What to do

- Ask the children to read the chapter 'Lavender'. What do they notice about the text in the first half (where Miss Honey is talking to the class) and the second half (where Lavender's plot is described)? Direct speech dominates the former, descriptive narrative the latter. Discuss how the different styles break up the text and help retain the reader's interest.
- Discuss what motivates Lavender's questions. Is she already hatching a plan? Could the reader guess the plan without the following narrative?
- Point out how Lavender makes her plans with military precision. Ask children to locate

references to support that statement.

- Invite the children to imagine that Lavender was absent on the day and gave a friend a list of instructions to follow her plan. How would such a text differ in layout and format? Ask: *Would that be easier to follow than picking out the sequence of events in narrative?*

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Challenge them to write Lavender's plan as if for another child to carry out the actions, in appropriate style and format, drawing on the original text. Suggest tips, such as Don't trap newt's tail. Make sure newt can breathe.

For younger/less confident learners: Write the following instructions on separate cards for children to sort into sequence: Empty pencil box and line with weed. Catch newt from pond. Slip newt into pencil box. Slide lid until almost closed. Collect glass and jug from school kitchen. Half-fill jug with water. Tip newt into jug. Place jug and glass on teacher's table.

Larger than life

Objective: To explain how writers use figurative and expressive language to create images and atmosphere.

What you need: Copies of *Matilda*, writing materials, photocopiable page 17.

What to do

- Read the chapter 'The Weekly Test' together, taking turns to read aloud. Ask the children to raise a hand whenever they notice a simile or a metaphor. Point out that, whereas children may be used to looking for 'like' and 'as' to alert them to similes, some of Dahl's figurative comparisons are presented differently. For example: 'You can hear the same sort of thing if you walk through a riding stable when the horses are being fed' or '... in the manner of a tigress stalking a small deer'.
- List these under 'similes' and 'metaphors'. They will include similes: 'as though ... inflated by a bicycle pump'; 'yelling like a stuck pig'; 'out of sight in boxes like hairpins and buttons';

metaphors: 'The headmistress thundered'; 'shrieking his head off'; 'a pillar of doom'.

- Discuss why the author chooses to use such expressive language. How does it help create a vivid picture and build up atmosphere? Replace some (in context) with a simple statement, to show how much stronger the figurative language sounds. ('She extended a hand the size of a tennis racquet' or 'She reached out one large hand' – which sounds more threatening and dramatic?)
- Hand out copies of photocopiable page 17. Encourage the children to find more examples of figurative language in the book.

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Invite children to invent their own similes and metaphors to replace those listed.

For younger/less confident learners: Challenge children to draw illustrations to match the figurative descriptions.

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