



International Learning and Research Centre

Languages and Literacy **The Story Making Strand**

Telling their Stories

**an analysis of pupils' perceptions of their
learning from the Story Making Project**



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2003

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Story Making Project Schools 2002 - 2003

Frogwell Primary School, Wiltshire

Longwell Green Primary School, South Gloucestershire

Marshfield CE Primary School, South Gloucestershire

The Mead Community Primary School, Wiltshire

Wick CE Primary School, South Gloucestershire



CfBT contributes funding to the Languages and Literacy project.

Languages and Literacy The Story Making Strand

Telling their Stories an analysis of pupils' perceptions of their learning from the Story Making project

Aim

This study aims to capture pupils' perceptions of their learning from the Story Making project. Through this, it seeks to identify effective teaching and learning styles that help children internalise patterns of language at word, sentence and text level.

Background

The Story Making project is a small-scale pilot project investigation in five primary schools drawn from South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. It forms part of a larger 'Languages and Literacy' project, co-ordinated by the International Learning and Research Centre to identify and develop common approaches to the teaching and learning of first and second language. Previous research findings have indicated the extent to which rich oral experiences enhance children's writing when linked through explicit teaching and learning processes. Work has been undertaken with both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils and teachers to investigate the nature and impact of these processes on children's learning.

Dimensions

This study has taken a talk-based approach to consulting pupils. It has been conducted in five primary schools where learning has been captured through age-appropriate interviews with small groups of mixed ability pupils ranging from Year 2 to Year 6. Pupils were asked to consider what helped them to learn the stories; how they might teach the stories to someone else; how they learnt to imitate, innovate and invent narrative; and how they might apply their learning in different contexts. A set of the questions used to prompt discussion are attached as Appendix 1.

Summary of Findings

- all pupils have demonstrated an overwhelmingly positive response to the range of story making activities experienced in their school contexts. Their enthusiasm, motivation and engagement as narrators has had a very positive impact on their self-esteem and their perceptions of themselves as language users
- the project has enabled many children to experience the power of storytelling for the first time
- learning has developed children's knowledge about language. Narrative structures and language features have been internalised and pupils are able to articulate how these can be used to best effect in their story telling and writing
- auditory learning characterised by repetition and the inclusion of repeated phrases has been key in the acquisition of new knowledge
- visual and kinaesthetic prompts have contributed significantly to effective learning at all three stages of learning – imitation, innovation and invention
- collaborative learning approaches are cited as the most successful strategy for embedding and improving story telling and story writing

- story performances to a range of audiences have motivated pupils to produce best quality work
- pupils have enjoyed these extended writing experiences and regard their work to be the best they have yet produced
- classroom learning contexts have been characterised by a sense of collaborative enquiry and ownership, enabling pupils to see themselves as co-learners alongside their teachers
- the project has empowered children to be resourceful learners. Equipped with the tools and skills of a good narrator, they have been given the opportunity to be inventive and creative in applying their learning in other contexts
- the project has enabled pupils to exercise high degrees of learner control and developed their metacognitive thinking
- their successes in first language (L1) instilled confidence and provided them with a secure foundation for risk-taking and learning stories in second language (L2).

Pupils' perceptions of their learning

Attitudes

All pupils have demonstrated an overwhelmingly positive response to the range of story making activities experienced in their school contexts. Their enthusiasm and engagement with the project is evident from both their individual reflections and their motivation to talk about their learning. The children's comments led me to deduce that the project was enabling many children to experience the power of storytelling for the first time.

There was strong evidence of positive pupil response. *'It was brilliant and I was proud I could tell the stories'*, one child said. *'It was a change from just writing down,'* and *'It was different... we hadn't really done much of it before and it helped me to write loads'*, were further responses.

This high enjoyment factor has impacted positively on the children's perceptions of themselves as language users. It has encouraged risk-taking and developed confidence. As one child observed, *'At first it felt a bit scary; now it feels good to be doing it.'* Another added, *'It has helped me find my confidence in saying things out loud.'*

Pupils communicated positive perceptions of themselves as storywriters, indicating that the project has helped them to improve their written work. One noted that, *'This is probably my best writing as I didn't have to think of as much.'* Another referred to the *'extended'* nature of her writing and was proud of both the quality and quantity of her efforts. A Year 6 pupil viewed the project as complementary to the statutory writing test she was shortly to encounter, suggesting that, *'It will help me with the SAT's as I could adapt a story I already know.'*

Motivated by their successes, pupils have shown themselves to be resourceful learners by extending their story making work at home. A group of Year 3 pupils were keen to share their innovated and invented stories, each of which demonstrated evidence of parental support and levels of attainment that exceeded age-related expectations.

When asked how they would approach storytelling in L2, children articulated equally positive perceptions of themselves as learners. Their successes in L1 have instilled confidence and provided them with a secure foundation for risk-taking.

Environment

Classroom learning contexts have been characterised by a sense of collaborative enquiry and ownership, enabling pupils to see themselves as co-learners alongside their teachers. My observations of pupil-teacher interactions in each school context indicate that classroom cultures are characterised by good relationships, positive self-esteem and a strong emphasis on 'learning about learning'.

Visually it is evident that the story-making project has a high profile in classrooms. For instance, a children's painted display illustrating the story of 'Mr Fox and his Bag' provided a valued visual prompt for storytelling in a year 2 classroom. A number of early years role-play areas have been designed to promote story-making activity and year 4 children, for performance purposes, have created a staged area and costumes. Pupils also noted the significance of their '*storytelling chair*' and '*story candle*' in creating '*the right atmosphere*.' The high status given to the project and teachers' commitment to creative approaches has impacted very positively on children's motivation to learn.

Learning Styles

From the children's responses, it is possible to gain valuable insights into their preferred learning styles. It is evident that all pupils benefited from multi-sensory teaching approaches and by working in collaborative contexts.

Auditory Learning

Auditory learning characterised by repetition and the inclusion of repeated phrases has been key in the acquisition of new stories. Pupils recognised the importance of 'over learning' the stories in order to be able to retell them. One child described how his class, '*learned it over and over and over again, in a circle with the whole class, on the listening centre and with our talk partners.*'

During the initial stage of 'listen and join in', pupils cited the inclusion of repeated phrases as helpful at the imitation stage of learning. The use of temporal connectives served to '*move the story on and made it feel like a journey*'. The teacher's intonation was also regarded as important, '*Miss O's voice went up and down and she always said the repeated bits in the same voice.*'

As teachers have withdrawn from the telling, it is evident that the presence of 'talk partners' is significant to the learning process. Children have felt '*comfortable trying out*' their stories with a partner prior to sharing their work with a wider audience. Talk partners in this context are regarded as good listeners and able to provide '*constructive criticism*' as critical friends. Although familiar with working in this way in relation to a written task, the extended oral nature of this partner exchange was new to many of the children.

Experiencing storytelling for the first time, one year 5 pupil described how the children had been required to *'rely on their brains rather than pieces of paper.'* Another surmised that, *'I thought that glancing at my paper would make it easier, but it wasn't. When I started to think about it I could see it in my head.....my head just started to know it.'* By relying and building on their sequential memory skills in this manner, pupils felt empowered as learners.

Encouraged to exercise high degrees of learner control, pupils expressed their preferred learning style and were provided with opportunities to explore it during story making sessions. At the imitation stage, the auditory learners chose to revisit the stories on tape to reinforce their learning. During innovation, they found it helpful to record themselves in order to evaluate their stories aurally.

Visual Learning

Many of the pupils emphasised the value of visual learning at all three learning stages (imitation, innovation, invention). Sequencing through pictures, the use of story maps, story staircases and story mountains were all seen as successful prompts that supported visual learners. These were used during both whole class teacher-led activity and paired tasks.

As well as providing useful prompts for remembering parts of the story, visual cues have developed children's knowledge and understanding of narrative structures. A visual representation of *'story shape'* used by one teacher served to reinforce learning. One Year 6 pupil referred to, *'basically stripping it (the story) back to planning and looking for its shape'*.

During innovation, children's ability to visualise these known structures provides them with confidence and a firm foundation for risk-taking. Whilst planning for writing, Year 4 pupils drew *'innovation brainstorm'* to help them explore ways of developing their own narrative. As Appendix 2 shows, character names, description, dialogue as well as story settings and objects have been chosen by the pupils for innovation purposes.

Kinaesthetic Learning

During the imitation phase of learning, the use of story actions became, as one Y5 pupil described, *'almost like a reflex'*. Further comments suggested that actions were regarded as *'vitaly important'* in helping pupils to establish the correct sequence of events and to keep a lively pace to their stories. Pupils naturally transferred this mode of learning to their innovated and invented stories to aid retelling to their 'talk partners' and wider audiences.

Re-enactment of the stories through role-play was very popular with the pupils and was cited as the most successful strategy for innovation and invention. As a Y6 pupil stated, *'I was able to make the characters more interesting and add humour to the story when acting it out'*. By providing a stage in the corner of her classroom, one teacher prompted her pupils to create costumes and props to invent a story based on the known tale of 'Skillywidden'. As one Y4 pupil observed, *'We produced our best work when performing in front of an audience..... it was brilliant!'*

A musical composition of the story in one classroom successfully contributed to pupils' learning of the story of 'Mr Fox and his Bag'. One child described how the *'rhythm of the story'* helped her to remember the key events. She deduced, *'the repeated bits had a rhythm I could catch hold of and remember'*.

Such experiential learning has captured imaginations and enhanced both pupils' enjoyment of learning and knowledge of narrative features.

Kinaesthetic learning has provided a vehicle for all children to access learning about narrative. Children who have encountered difficulties and have a low self-esteem of themselves as language learners have experienced success through kinaesthetic story making approaches. Many of these are explored in Elizabeth Roger's report¹ that captures the experiences of lower achievers and children with special educational needs.

Knowledge about Language

Learning through the story-making project has developed children's knowledge of language and its structure. Narrative language features have been internalised and pupils are able to articulate how these can be used to best effect in their story telling and writing. This has been evident at word, sentence and whole text level.

At the imitation stage of learning, pupils have been introduced to new vocabulary appropriate to a narrative context. Their repertoire of temporal connectives and adverbial phrases has been extended through repetition and over learning. Writing samples demonstrate that pupils' acquisition of these language features is enabling them to write more coherently and helping them to develop their use of sentence punctuation and paragraphing. This is illustrated by Year 6 writing samples attached as Appendix 3.

The children's description of the process of innovation has highlighted their knowledge about learning. One pupil commented, *'I added more description to the characters, more powerful verbs to make it better and more humour.'* Children's understanding of story has been both reinforced and extended as they have identified story elements to add in, take out or change during the innovation phase of storytelling and writing.

At whole text level, pupils have internalised the underlying story plots. Many of them referred to the journeying element of 'Little Daisy' and 'Mr Fox and his Bag.' One child related this observation to other known stories, noticing that, *'The Mr Fox story is like 'Going on a Bear Hunt and Rosie's Walk.'*

The introduction and use of visual narrative planning formats has supported children's learning at whole text level. *'Story mountains'* and *'story staircases'* have helped children to see, *'how the stories build up in small steps, with the opening, problem and resolution.'* Older pupils have recognised the value of becoming familiar with, *'nice and easy basic stories to start'*, although some now felt ready for, *'more complex stories, like those written by Michael Murpurgo.'*

¹ Getting the Words Back. Elizabeth Rogers 2003
International Learning and Research Centre publication

At the ‘invention stage’, pupils have drawn on their knowledge of the generic structure of a traditional tale to make ‘unexpected’ changes such as *‘a twist in the tale’* or, *‘by starting with the problem in the story.’* Such examples demonstrate how the project is enabling pupils to use their writer’s knowledge to make creative responses.

Cross –Curricular Learning

Significantly, many pupils have commented on the relevance of their learning from the story-making project to other areas of the curriculum. A group of year 5 pupils experienced story making in the context of a history project on ancient Greece where they changed the known myth of ‘Pandora’s Box.’. In discussion, the children were able to cite common features of a myth and were aware of how these provided the foundation for both innovation and invention. All of the pupils recognised the value of ‘talk for writing’ and through verbal rehearsal were clearly benefiting from a rich oral experience of telling, retelling and refining their spoken texts as a preparation for writing.

Pupils felt that the process of learning underpinning the story making project was *‘very useful’* and could *‘help their learning in art, poetry and debates’*. Although their ideas were relatively underdeveloped, their confidence in and understanding of the process of learning cannot be underestimated. The scope of this approach to other text types across the curriculum warrants further research and builds on approaches advocated by national strategies.

During my research across the five pilot schools, I have been struck by the perceptive and insightful nature of the pupils’ perspectives on learning. As well as an ability to articulate their knowledge about language, pupils have demonstrated high levels of metacognitive thinking indicative of ‘deep learning’².

It is evident that teachers have empowered their pupils to be ‘resourceful, resilient and reflective learners’² by establishing an environment characterised by high levels of learner curiosity, participation and control. Classroom contexts have successfully engendered a sense of collaborative enquiry, as teacher researchers have sought to model their own learning for pupils.

This study has enabled learning from first principles, pupil voice and an enquiry based approach. As I have listened to children ‘telling the story’ of their own learning, strong evidence of high standards, enjoyment and creativity have emerged. The potential of now transferring this learning to new contexts presents an exciting challenge for all.

Nicola Theobald

²ALPS Resource Book, NEP 2001

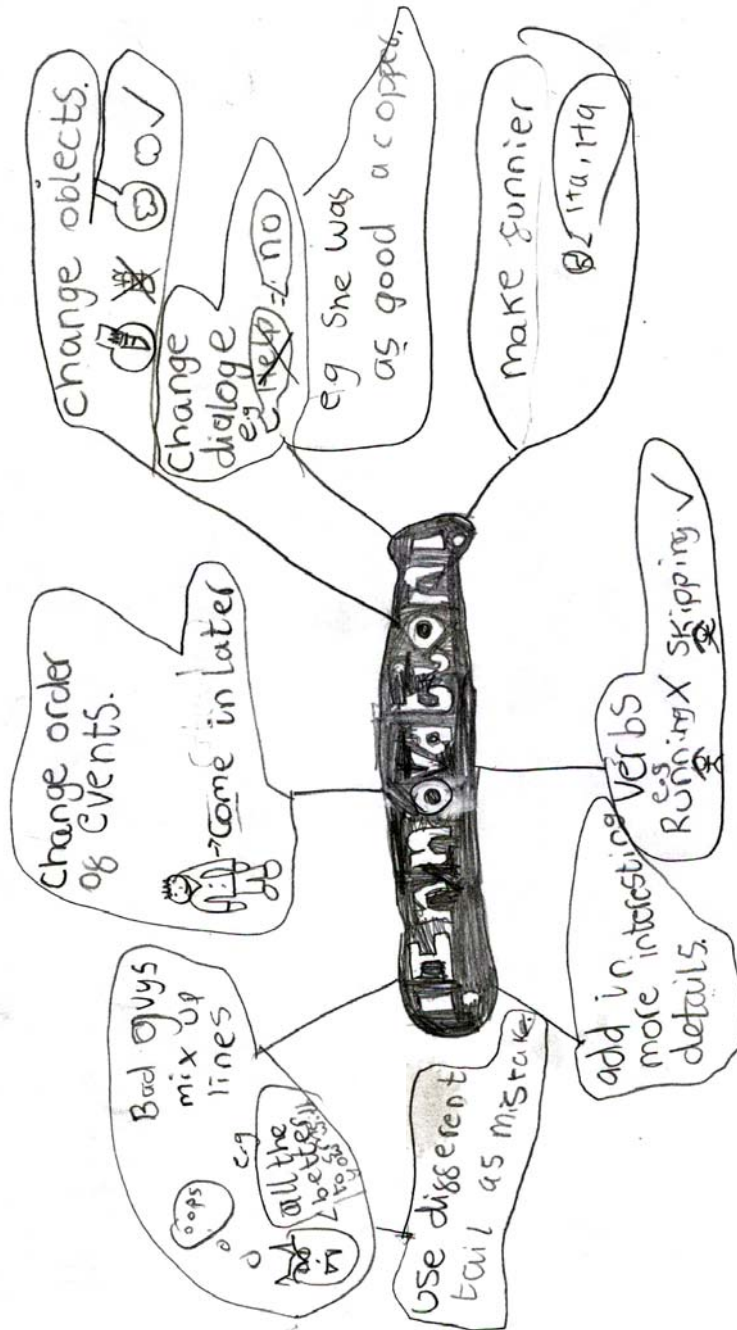
APPENDIX 1

Telling their Stories: an analysis of pupil perceptions of their learning from the story making project

Questions used to prompt discussion with pupils

- Have you enjoyed the story making project work?
- What was the best thing about the project?
- Have you done work like this before?
- Which story was the easiest to learn?
- What helped you to learn the story of Little Daisy/Mr Fox/Skillywidden?
- How did your ‘talk partner’ help you?
- How would you teach someone else this story?
- What have you learnt about the make up of traditional stories?
- How did you change the stories to make them your own?
- What did you change first?
- How does storytelling help you with your story writing?
- Has your learning from the story making project helped you to write new stories?
- How could you use your learning from this project to help you with other work?
- How do you feel about yourself as a storyteller/storywriters?
- How have you shared your learning with other classes and at home?
- How are you getting on with learning stories in French?

An innovation brainstorm



BLUEBELL AND HER SHELL

Once upon a time, down in the murky depths of the Pacific Ocean lived a beautiful mermaid. She had long golden hair, bright blue eyes and rose red lips; her name was Bluebell.

Early one morning, Bluebell woke up and decided to go outside. Out of the corner of her eye she saw something glint, she swam down and picked it up. It was an oyster shell, next to it she saw a piece of paper with the words: “Instructions for shell, Do not open unless you have permission otherwise you will cough up 1 million earth slugs. If you open it with the permission of the person who finds me then you will get a wonderful surprise”

Suddenly Bluebell had an idea, she would go to find someone she could trust. She picked up the shell and swam off. She swam and swam and swam until she came to Daffy dolphins house. She knocked on the door and went straight in. “Daffy, please may I leave my shell here while I go and visit my Auntie Blueberry? There is one thing, while I’m gone mind you don’t look in the shell!”

So she carefully placed the shell on the rock and swam out. Now, Daffy was just polishing his fins for he was very vain. But as soon as Bluebell had left the cave he jumped up, picked up the shell and opened it. At once he felt something coming up his throat. The next thing he knew he was coughing up earth slugs!!

When Bluebell arrived back at Daffy's house she found the place covered in slugs. Bluebell wasn't surprised, so she picked up her shell and swam off.

She swam and swam and swam. Soon she came to puffy puffer fish's house. Bluebell knocked on the door and went straight in. "Puffy, please can I leave my shell here while I visit my Auntie Blueberry? There is one thing while I'm gone mind you don't look in the shell!!!"

So she carefully placed the shell on the rock and swam away. Now, Puffy was just sitting there sharpening his spikes for he was very vain. But as soon as Bluebell left he jumped up, picked up the shell and opened it. At once he felt something coming up his throat. The next thing he knew he was coughing up earth slugs! When Bluebell arrived back at Puffy's house, she found the place covered with slugs, Bluebell wasn't surprised, so she picked up her shell and swam off.

She swam and swam and swam, soon she came to Sharky Shark's cave, she knocked on the door and went straight in. "Sharky, please may I leave my shell here while I go and visit my Auntie Blueberry? There is one thing, while I'm gone: Mind you don't look in my shell!"

So she placed the shell on the rock and swam off. Now Sharky was just sitting there cleaning his sparkly white teeth for he was very vain but as soon as Bluebell had left the cave he jumped up, picked up the shell and opened it. At once he felt something coming up his throat! The next thing he knew he was coughing up earth slugs!!!

When Bluebell arrived back at Sharky cave she found the place covered with earth slugs! Bluebell wasn't surprised so she picked up her shell and swam off.

She swam and swam and swam; soon she came to the Place where Mando The Prince of Mermaids lived. She knocked on the door and waited for an answer as soon as she got one she went straight in. “Your majesty please may I leave my shell here while I go and visit my Auntie Blueberry? There is one thing though while I’m gone mind you don’t open the shell!”

So she placed the shell on the rock and swam off. Prince Mando looked at the shell but didn’t have any interest in it whatsoever. So he sat down to wait for Bluebell.

When Bluebell arrived back at the palace she didn’t find the place covered with slugs! She swam up to him looked deep into his eyes and fell completely in love, he felt the same way and they decided to marry!

At the wedding Bluebell was getting into her wedding outfit when suddenly it ripped! Bluebell was in hysterics when she saw the shell She walked over to it and opened it. At once a beautiful wedding dress appeared Bluebell could almost burst with happiness, She swam down the isle so proudly that Mando could hardly wait for their honeymoon to the Mediterranean Sea!

When they came back from their honeymoon they had three children two girls which both grew up to be amazing princesses and one lovely boy that grew up to be the mayor of the Pacific.

And they lived happily ever after

The End

Scully the dragon and his satchel

One day, in the heart of medieval England, there stood a mountain that towered over a nearby village, and in that mountain there was a cave. The villagers below had no idea that in the cave there lurked a dragon whose name was Scully. He had long red wings with the wingspan of 4m. His body was red as well. His fangs were 5cm long, and as sharp as knives.

One morning Scully felt hungry so he grabbed his red satchel and flew slowly down to the unsuspecting villagers below. On the way down he came across a bumblebee. He caught it, put it in his satchel and descended down.

He soon came to a red cottage. He knocked on the door and strutted in. He said to the little old lady who lived there “May I leave my satchel here while I visit my uncle Smeagol? But while I’m gone mind you don’t look in my satchel” without waiting for an answer, he stormed out and disappeared into the air. The little old lady grew curious, so she opened the satchel with baited breath. Out popped the bee. It flew out of the window and into the yard and was eaten up by a chicken. At that moment Scully came back, “where’s my bee?” he asked.

“I’m so sorry, I opened your bag and it flew into my chickens beak!” replied the frantic women. “I’ll have your chicken instead then.” So Scully marched outside, picked up the chicken and shoved it into his satchel and went on his way.

He soon came to a blue cottage. He knocked on the door and strutted in. He said to the little old lady who lived there “May I leave my satchel here while I visit my uncle Smeagol? But while I’m gone mind you don’t look in my satchel” without waiting for an answer, he stormed out with baited breath. Out popped the chicken. It flew out of the window and into the yard and was eaten up by a pig. At that moment Scully came back, “where’s my chicken?” he asked.

“I’m so sorry, I opened your bag and it flew into my pigs mouth!” replied the frantic women. “I’ll have your pig instead then.” So Scully marched outside, picked up the pig and shoved it into his satchel and went on his way.

He soon came to a purple cottage. He knocked on the door and strutted in. He said to the little old lady who lived there “May I leave my satchel here while I visit my uncle Smeagol? But while I’m gone mind you don’t look in my satchel” without waiting for an answer, he stormed out and disappeared into the air. The little old lady grew curious, so she opened the satchel with baited breath. Out popped the pig. It flew out of the window and into the yard and was chased off by a boy. At that moment Scully came back “Where’s my pig?” he asked.

“I’m so sorry, I opened your bag and it got chased away by my boy!” replied the frantic women. “I’ll have your boy instead then.” So Scully marched outside, picked up the boy and shoved it into his satchel and went on his way.

Scully soon came to a yellow cottage where a lady was cooking gingerbread for her three daughters, who were waiting at a table. Scully asked the mother “May I leave my bag here while I visit my uncle Smeagol? But while I’m gone mind you don’t look in my satchel” without waiting for an answer he stormed outside and flew away.

The mother closed the oven door, the gingerbread smelled so appetizing and the boy cried out. The mother and her daughters were so surprised, they opened the bag, out popped the boy and he was so scared that he hid in the cupboard. The cunning mother opened a can of something labeled “itching lice” she poured the tiny bugs into the empty satchel and slowly closed it. At that moment Scully came back and she just had time to hide the can behind her back. Without a word he came in and took away his satchel.

Scully soon came to a lake. He had a drink and opened his satchel ravenously, suddenly, before Scully could open his mouth to emit a scream, tiny bugs leapt out of the satchel and swarmed over him. Scully couldn't take it any longer. He dived headfirst in the steam, washing away the lice. Now, what dragons hate more than anything in god's green earth is water. So Scully learned not to trick people again.

If you want to know what happened to the boy, the mother took him home and he ran up to the front door, banged it mercilessly. The old lady opened the door looking hopeful. She gathered the boy up in her arms and smothered him with kisses.

The End

By Rebecca Dyer
April 2003

The Girl and the Box

Once upon a time, in a pretty little cottage down by the seaside, lived a lonely girl called Sophie.

Early one morning, Sophie decided to play outside. As she stepped outside into the garden, she tripped over a tiny box marked clearly, 'Do not open.' Sophie picked up the box and discreetly slipped it into her pocket! Although she had had no friends for a year, Sophie strolled hopefully down the road to find someone to play with.

Not long after Sophie set off, she came across a small bungalow. She knocked on the door and politely waited for someone to answer. Eventually, the door was opened and Sophie tiptoed inside. Out of the light appeared a small girl about Sophie's age; she had long dark hair and a nasty look about her. "Please may I leave my box here while I go to find a friend?" "There is one thing though, while I'm gone, mind you don't look in my box!" With that, off rushed Sophie to find a friend.

The little girl grew curious. After a while, she could take it no longer, the girl opened the box Out flew a curse, which made the girl throw up worms continuously. At that moment, Sophie arrived back unsuccessfully. "Where is my box?" asked Sophie. But the poor little girl could not answer for she was surrounded in worms.

At once, Sophie realised that this box was a magic box. She then came up with a clever and cunning idea, she would use the box to find her friends, if she returned and something unusual had happened, she knew that this person could not be trusted!

Sophie set off again to find a friend. After a while, she arrived at a different cottage with a thatched roof. Sophie knocked on the door, before storming straight inside! Standing by the radiator was a little girl about Sophie's age. "Please may you look after my box while I.... go to the shops?" she asked, "There is one thing though, don't look inside the box." With that, off walked Sophie, very slyly.

Now, the little girl grew so curious, that at last, she couldn't take it any longer She opened the box and out flew a powerful curse, making the girl continuously throw up slugs.

Back came Sophie, as she walked in through the door, she instantly knew what had happened. She grabbed her box and rushed off outside, knowing that this girl was not the right person to become friends with.

Sophie walked and walked and walked until eventually she arrived at a big gloomy house. She banged on the door and stormed straight inside! "Look after my bag whilst I visit the marked!" Sophie demanded from the girl that lived there, "But don't look inside, or else!"

Off stormed Sophie, she walked down the road and turned the corner.

Meanwhile, the little girl grew curious. However, this little girl was polite and well brought up, so she did not open the box!

At that moment, Sophie arrived back. "Where is my box?" Sophie asked. "Why it is right here," the little girl answered. Immediately, Sophie knew that this was the right person to be friends with. "You're going to be my new friend," ordered Sophie, leaving the poor girl no choice in the matter, but the little girl didn't wish to be Sophie's friend! In her anger, the box's lid flew open sending out a curse so powerful, it banished Sophie to a far away land! There, she met a girl with a clone personality. So it was a happy ending, after all, Sophie got what she wanted, a friend.