

One BIG story

Following Off The Page Drama CIC's highly successful pilot of One Big Story in Durham City (September 2012), funding was secured from Arts Council England and Derwent Valley Area Action Partnership to run the project again.

Project outline

One Big Story took place February to April 2014 across eight primary schools in Derwent Valley with over 200 children taking part. Year 5 and 6 classes from the schools enjoyed a one day workshop with a writer, illustrator, drama facilitator and support worker to explore their story ideas. Each school was responsible for one chapter and these have come together to make a book: *Mr Minotaur's Minor Tour*. This was published in March and every child received their own copy of the book at a special celebration event at the local library. The children also received a One Big Story notebook in which they could write their own story ideas. The children were encouraged to visit their libraries in the future and given opportunity to become members.



The aims of One Big Story can be summarised as follows:

- Encourage the children to be excited about reading and writing.
- Give the children greater confidence in their ideas and creativity.
- Have a positive impact on the children's literacy.

Timescale

10th – 28th February

3rd – 28th March

31st March – 5th April

Workshops in schools

Book written, illustrated and published

Celebration events in local libraries

One Big Story Team

The project was run through Off The Page Drama CIC with Christina Maiden (Project Coordinator and Drama Facilitator), Seymour Jacklin (Writer and Facilitator), Daniel Weatheritt (Illustrator and Facilitator) and Neil Garlick (Support Worker). The book was published by McKnight and Bishop and the short film was produced by Chris Morgan.

The schools participating in the project:

Our Lady and St Joseph's RCVA Primary School
Delves Lane Community School
Benfieldside Primary School
St Patrick's RCVA Primary School (Dipton)
St Pius Xth RC Primary School
Shotley Bridge Junior School
Bishop Ian Ramsey C of E Primary School
Consett Junior School

School workshops

The workshops were extremely fast-paced and followed a clear structure in order to allow the children the greatest creative freedom. There was a mix of work done individually, in pairs, in small groups and as a whole class. The activities built up throughout the day to ensure that less confident children felt increasingly able to contribute as the workshop progressed.

While the school workshops followed a similar structure to those in the pilot, some alterations were made; most notably, a new activity which focused on descriptive writing and a section focused on illustration. The latter included an interactive storytime (Daniel illustrating *The Clown* as Seymour read it) and time set aside for looking at Daniel's sketchbooks.

Following feedback from the pilot project, each class teacher was sent pre-workshop activity suggestions. These got the children ready for story-making and helped warm them up, ready for the workshop. The teachers made good use of this resource.



Morning (pre-break)

- **Introduction** – explaining the One Big Story project and structure of the day's workshop.
- **Warm up** – some drama activities to get the group moving, working together and thinking creatively.
- **Full group discussion** – about which stories they enjoy and why. This leading on to a focus on characters.
- **Characters** - working individually for 10-15minutes to design their own character, then into pairs to create a short, character-based story event (using both writing and drama)
- **Stonking similes** – 15minutes playing with different ways of using description (linking to the character work), ultimately building up to one 'stonking simile'.

Morning (post-break)

- **Gathering ideas** – suggestions for place, character and object as a whole group.
- **Developing ideas** – in small groups develop a specific idea and feedback to the group.
- **Developing the story** – tell the One Big Story plot so far and develop the narrative line for the chapter with whole group.

Afternoon

- **Illustrating a story** – interactive storytime and viewing Daniel's sketchbooks.
- **Carousel** - focus areas: writing, illustration and drama. Groups visit each area to develop different aspects of their story. A showback after each slot to aid plot development.
- **Cliffhanger/chapter titles** – in small groups, decide on a chapter title and a cliffhanger to pass on to the next school. These are handed in and decided on by the team (crucial to have a helpful cliffhanger for the next school).
- **What else?** - each child given a sheet of paper and time on their own to draw/write anything they have not had chance to contribute.
- **Evaluation and goodbye** – children given opportunity to give their opinion of the day individually (written and verbal) and as a class (physically). A final 'well done' and goodbye.

Each teacher was left with extension activity suggestions following on from and developing the skills introduced in the session.

Library visits

We worked closely with Consett Library to plan the special celebration events. Each class visited the library for a 2 hour session during which they took part in a quiz (to familiarise themselves with what is available at the library and how to best use it), had time to browse the books and enjoyed making bookmarks as a craft activity. Following this, a member of the One Big Story team talked with the children about the process of pulling their chapter together and discussed what they remembered creating. They then heard their chapter read aloud for the first time. The children were given their own copy of the book and some time to sit and enjoy looking at it with their classmates. After a short evaluation activity, the children then left with a goody bag.

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation and feedback continue to be central to One Big Story's development and improvement. Formal and informal evaluation/feedback took place through written and verbal activities with the following:

- One Big Story team
- Children participating in the workshops
- Class teachers
- Librarians/library staff
- Members of the local community (visitors to the library)

Numerical data

205 children took part in One Big Story:

- Overall, the number of children answering 'Yes' to the question: 'Do you enjoy writing stories?' **increased from 40% to 97%**.
 - o The most dramatic change was at Bishop Ian Ramsey CE Primary school where there was an increase from 30% to 100% in the number of children who answered 'Yes' to the question: 'Do you enjoy writing stories?'
- Overall, the number of children answering 'Yes' to the question: 'Do you think your ideas would make an amazing story?' **increased from 29% to 59%**.
 - o The most dramatic change was at Benfieldside Primary School where there was an increase from 22% to 91% in the number of children who answered 'Yes' to the question: Do you think your ideas would make an amazing story?'

100% of teachers who completed an evaluation form agreed that One Big Story met its aims of:

- Getting children excited about reading and writing
- Giving the children greater confidence in their creativity

We were also very grateful to have the support of Ulrike Thomas (Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University) who worked with Benfieldside Primary, speaking with the children and class teacher, to evaluate the impact of One Big Story. The feedback was extremely positive and clearly showed the ways in which One Big Story accomplishes its aims. This research has fed directly into the project development and will influence the shape of One Big Story in the future. To view this report, please contact info@offthepagedrama.com.

What the children had to say...

During the library visits, we asked the children to write what they thought of One Big Story on a triangle of coloured paper. We then made bunting to decorate the project displays. Here are some examples of what the children wrote:



'My One Big Story experience was so epicly epic. I loved it. Yeh!!'

'One big story is fantastic. Can't wait to start reading. Great. Epic. Mint.'

'Now I feel so weird being an author. It is the best thing ever.'

'It is so cool to have your ideas being used.'

'Thank you for letting my school do a chapter of a book. It is the best thing ever to do! Great day.'

'Thank you. It was a great experience for me and made me enjoy writing and drawing more.'

'Once in a lifetime opportunity.'



What the teachers had to say...

A fantastic project which really excited our children. It has really encouraged our children to look at writing in a different way.
Mrs Thorpe (Teacher, St Patrick's RC Primary School (Dipton))

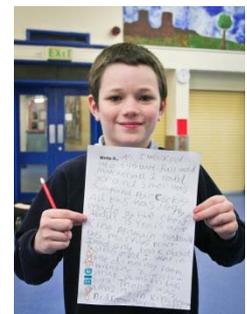
The workshop has given the children the confidence to use their ideas in their own work no matter how outlandish they are... Some of the children have talked about becoming authors when they are older.
Angie Leggett (Teacher, Consett Junior School)

I was very impressed with the One Big Story Team. The children got a lot out of the project and were so proud of their finished chapter... The children are very enthusiastic about writing stories now!
John Hannan (Teacher, Delves Lane Community School)

The children are more confident. More willing to have a go.
Mrs Heslop (Teacher, Benfieldside Primary School)

The children were so engaged and enthusiastic about the process. It really encouraged creativity and developed their literacy skills.
Mark Milburn (Teacher, Bishop Ian Ramsey CE Primary School)

Some photographs...



What was discovered...

Good to have support

Following the team's evaluation of the One Big Story pilot, it was suggested that an extra pair of hands would be helpful; having someone to focus specifically on those children struggling to engage for whatever reason. Before the workshops in Derwent Valley started, therefore, we advertised for a Support Worker and were overwhelmed by the response. After a week of sifting through application forms, we welcomed Neil Garlick to the project. His passion for helping children to develop their creativity and his experience of working with children with additional needs in a school setting made him a valuable addition to the team. Neil was able to work one on one with children who were finding activities challenging and also to provide support in group settings throughout the workshop. Having a member of the team whose focus was making sure as many children as possible were involved was extremely useful and certainly improved the project.

Out of the classroom

Trying to fit a workshop into busy school calendars is not always easy, particularly as we were asking for use of the school hall for the whole day. Generally we would need to move out of the hall before midday (for lunchtime set up) and would have to wait for 10-15minutes after lunch to return. In these periods, we would continue the session in the children's classroom. In moving between these two rooms, the influence of place on creativity was highlighted. When children take part in writing or drawing activities, it is usually in their classroom, sitting behind their desks. During the workshop, we deliberately moved any chairs or tables out of the way. The children would write or draw whilst on the floor and often chose to do so lying down. This immediately gave a sense of play and freedom (especially as the adults in the room were also joining them on the floor) and it challenged the children's understanding of the 'correct way' to do creative writing. Many of the teachers noted the difference simply being in the school hall had on their class's creative response and it was a reminder to the team that as much of the One Big Story workshop as possible should be spent outside the classroom.

Conflict and collaboration

The 15minutes before lunchtime when we would ask the children 'What should happen in your chapter' was always exciting and terrifying. It was at this moment that we needed a basic plotline to be established and for all of the children to agree on the narrative line of their chapter. Generally, a class would throw around some ideas, there would be a few slight disagreements, then a compromise, and then it would all come together. In two of the schools, this process played out extremely differently. In one of the classes, the children agreed with every idea suggested and when asked, 'Are we all happy with this?' nodded along. In another school, however, an argument quickly broke out with different children shouting, 'No, that shouldn't happen' or 'That doesn't work'. It was easy to view the conflict negatively and the compromise positively, however, on reflection, the team discovered that this was not necessarily the case. The children in the class who argued were undoubtedly all invested in and passionate about their ideas. They felt they had to speak up because it was important that their chapter made sense and was as good as it could be. The class who nodded along were the most placid of the groups we worked with and were the hardest to tease out original and creative ideas from. This is not to say that creativity should involve disagreement, but rather that sometimes arguments reveal a deep investment and passion about what is being created. The group who disagreed with each other learnt a lot about collaboration and compromise through the workshop and created a fantastic chapter in the process. This experience taught the team not to worry when there is conflict but to focus energy on guiding the children towards collaboration. Similarly, we realised that with a group who agreed with each other too readily, pulling out creative ideas and encouraging originality could take more effort.

More One Big Story...

We are thrilled to announce that we will be starting the third One Big Story project at the end of April 2014. This project will take place in Ferryhill, County Durham.

Supporters

We are extremely grateful to Arts Council England and Derwent Valley Area Action Partnership for enabling One Big Story to take place.



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