

A learning sequence using *Sky Song* by Abi Elphinstone for Upper KS2



About my learning sequences: I cannot plan your English lessons for you as I do not know your class and their strengths and needs. However, I can plan a sequence of learning using a fantastic book as the learning tool. My sequence is generic and, with teaching, one size does definitely not fit all. Please use my ideas and adapt them to work for your class and setting. You will see that I have not differentiated, considered SEN or set learning objectives. Schools are all unique in how they do this. The title of each session is the focus, but please adapt this to fit your setting. I always see learning in a sequence as developing broader learning objectives and these can be found below and are taken from the National Curriculum.

When planning, I do not plan to ensure each session is an hour: I plan to ensure my learning intention is fulfilled. Some of these sessions may only take 20-30 minutes, while others can take much longer. If you have a rigid timetable you may decide to combine sessions. If your timetable is flexible, you will have further time for other activities when the session is short.

This learning sequence: In this sequence, I have demonstrated how this book is excellent for exploring character development. It would also be a fantastic stimulus for setting development (and pretty much every other curriculum objective!)

Please read the book before embarking on a sequence of learning using it. It is a wonderful book and I promise it will be a pleasure to read. I suggest having 8 copies available for your class. This allows one copy between a group of 4 so they can discuss sections when the planning requires it. The planning only requires the first 5 chapters to be read. Continue the book as the class text – it will engage and inspire long after this learning sequence is over.

Please note spelling objectives are not included in this sequence of learning.

Learning sequence writing outcome: An entertaining narrative with engaging, believable characters created through vocabulary choices and grammatical structures which add variety.

Learning sequence objectives:

When reading:

- Discuss the impact of language on the reader
- Participate in discussions about books, building on their own and others' views
- Explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read

When writing:

- identify the audience and purpose and using similar writing as models for their own
- consider how authors have developed characters
- select appropriate grammar and vocabulary to entertain

Session 1: The Hook – sharing the audience and purpose Share the map from the book cover. Explain to the children that they will be setting off on a quest to this land and visiting these places. Ask the children, either in groups or independently to consider which characters they may meet in the different places (e.g. *Fur Tribe* – what might they be like? Who might live in the *Devil's Dancefloor*?) Who might go on this quest? What might they be looking for? Tell the children that at the end of the sequence they will be creating their own books, which can either be based on this map or maps of their own lands. Their books will be reproduced and sold at the Summer Fayre.

Session 2: Prologue – shared reading session to set the scene.

Create a campfire in the classroom and have Ursa Minor constellation up on the board. Teacher to tell the story of the prologue – ideally with (fake!) furs on and dimmed lights to create the atmosphere. Children to imagine they are one of the children on Erkenwald. What would they do? Hide? Follow their parents' voices? Attack? Something else? Discuss. Fantastic quote on page 6 about adventures which could be displayed on the learning wall.



Session 4: RaaW - creating a character – using sentence structure to add variety: Read p.14 and 15.

How is Flint similar/ different to Eska? Children annotate what they know about Flint from Abi's description. Do you like Flint? Why? Why not? Focus on Abi's use of sentence structures. The same ideas have been written out below but using a repetitive sentence structure. **Either** a) Get the children to compare the two and discuss the difference **or** b) Do not share the repetitive structure rewrite with them but instead get them to have a go at rewriting a few sentences ensuring that Flint, the subject, is always at the very start of the sentence, either as Flint or He. This helps them notice how Abi has varied her sentence structures. Discuss the different ways Abi starts sentences: adverbials, the subject (sometimes referred to using pronouns or synonyms), conjunctions (can lead to an interesting discussion around using 'but' to start a sentence). Read on to the end of the 1st paragraph on p.16. What might happen next? Agree on one scenario and model the thinking process relating to varying sentence structure. Children to continue the scene developing the character of Flint with subtle description, focusing on sentence structure to engage the reader. They can either use the scenario discussed or create their own. Review: partner up and read your scene to a friend. Are they engaged? Do the sentence starters add variety? How could you engage further? Children to add a thought bubble at the end of their work explaining what they will take from this lesson to their final piece. Read the rest of Chapter 2 before the next session.

Session 3: Reading as a writer (RaaW) - creating a character:

Introduce the class to the author: <http://www.abielphinstone.com/> Explain that Sky Song is going to teach us how to make our writing great. Focus will be on how Abi (the author) creates characters and uses a variety of sentence structures to engage the reader. Today: consider how to introduce a main character. What works and what doesn't. Show the children the pretend Chapter One: Eska (see below). Does this opening get you excited about reading on? Do you feel you really know Eska's character? Compare it to p.7 – 8. Firstly, just read the children the pages so they can enjoy them. Then provide them with copies to consider. Children annotate what Eska's actions tell us about her character and how Abi has integrated physical descriptions within the narrative. Children consider – what do we know? What do we think we know? What would we like to know? And words/ phrases we'd like to magpie. Read the rest of Chapter 1 before the next session.

Session 5: RaaW - creating a character – how characters interact

Reread the last paragraph of Chapter 2. How does Abi ensure the first time they meet is interesting to the reader? (Short sentence, withholding something from the reader, the plea for help and ending the chapter on a cliff-hanger). Allow the children to listen and enjoy Chapter 3. Discuss: how can we learn about characters from how they interact with each other? In groups of 4, children choose to focus on Flint or Eska. On sugar paper, children draw their character's outline. Inside the outline, children note how their character feels about the other character and, if relevant, a quote from the text to support this. On the outside, put actions the character does in relation to the other character. Also add speech bubbles of what they say and thought bubbles of things that may be puzzling their character. Discuss: As the writer, how does Abi ensure their interactions are interesting to the reader? Children add a thought bubble in their English journals explaining what they will take from this lesson to their final piece.

Session 6: RaaW - creating a character – the use of language

Read p.27 and p.28 to the children so they can enjoy the story. What happened? Did you find it interesting? How does Abi make it interesting for us to listen to/ read? In groups of 4, children look at these two pages in more detail and thought shower the words/ phrases that Abi uses to develop the characters and then also the setting. Thinking point: Does Abi always use a lot of description or is there times she keeps it very simple? Why does she do this? Children add a thought bubble in their English journals explaining what they will take from this lesson to their final piece.



Session 8: RaaW - creating a story – using sentence structure to add variety: Read the first sentence from Chapter 5. How would Eska feel? Abi could write 'Eska was relieved.' But this may not engage the reader and help them paint a picture. In pairs, children compose a sentence to show the reader Eska felt relieved. Share and then put Abi's sentence on the board. Discuss what makes the sentence engaging for the reader. In groups of 4, children to read to the end of p.37. Abi uses multi-clause sentences frequently in her writing, often with subordinate clauses. Provide children with the main clause/s and the subordinate clause separately. Children to discuss where in the sentence the clause fits best and why. Can it fit anywhere else in the sentence? Why is it less effective? How does Abi use dashes? Why does she use them and how do they help the reader?

Optional: Children look at their plans/ opening paragraphs and continue to write/ edit based on today's session OR children add a thought bubble in their English journals explaining what they will take from this lesson to their final piece. Read to the end of Chapter 5 by the next session.

Session 9: Creating a believable character using drama

Children think of three words to describe Flint and three words to describe Eska. Why those words? How has Abi developed the characters so we see them as actual people? Session 9 has two options.

Option 1: In Chapter 6, Eska and Flint continue their journey through Deeproots back to the Fur Tribe. In pairs, create a scene to portray this, demonstrating their relationship so that it is in-keeping with what we have learnt so far about their characters.

Option 2: Consider the first scene the two characters from your story are in together. In pairs, choose one child's story and act out this scene, ensuring that how they act and talk is in-keeping with the characters the child is keen to develop.

For both options: Write a diary entry in role as one character discussing the other character. The focus of this writing is developing a well-rounded character not sentence structure etc.

Session 10: RoaA - developing the plot

Teacher to have looked at plots from Session 7 and identified children who need further support with their plot development. Children look back at their thought bubbles from previous sessions. Ensure children feel ready to start writing their stories – address any concerns raised. Key success criteria: engaging the reader and creating well-rounded characters. How will you do this? Interesting language choices; show not tell; develop the character through actions, thoughts and interactions and varied sentence structure and punctuation. Provide children with time to write their stories. Teacher to work with children identified as requiring support with plot development.

Review: Children choose a friendly ear to listen to their story. Does it engage? Are the characters believable? How can I improve it? Thought bubble ideas for the next session.

Session 7: In the role of an author (RoaA): planning a plot

What has *Sky Song* taught the class regarding developing an engaging story with believable, interesting characters? Today, start thinking about the stories you will create. They will not be lengthy like *Sky Song* so the plot must be relatively simple. Look back at ideas created in Session 1. All children to develop a story with a maximum of two main characters. The main characters are on a quest to find something. They overcome difficulty. They retrieve the something. The main characters can be Flint and Eska or children can create their own. It can be set in Erkenwald, or they can create their own world. In the world they create, ensure the characters encounter no more than two difficulties – otherwise the description and engagement will suffer (their story cannot be set in 7 different locations like *Sky Song*). Children start to brainstorm, discuss and formulate an idea for their own stories. Teacher listens to ideas. Provide planning scaffolds, if useful. Children can attempt to write their opening paragraph, if time. Read to the end of Ch.4 by the next session.

Session 11: RoaA - using a thesaurus effectively

Provide the children with a sentence from somebody's work to up-level vocabulary. Select a word and use the thesaurus to identify synonyms. Which would work? Which wouldn't? Discuss shades of meaning and only selecting words from a thesaurus which they have encountered before and understand the context. In pairs, children to select a couple of further sentences to up-level, selecting appropriate synonyms.



Session 12 and 13: RoaA - writing the story

Teacher to have identified issues from Session 10 to address at the start of this session. Identify a guided group based on needs identified. Include a further skills-based lesson if required.

10 minutes to reflect on writing so far. Edit/ adapt considering previous discussions and second reading revisions.

Then children to continue writing their stories using the key success criteria identified. Stories must be complete by the end of session 13.

Session 15: RoaA - time to edit

Teacher to model editing a story considering the editor's letter. The focus today is on composition and sentence structures NOT spelling. Children develop their stories to ensure they fulfil the Success Criteria.

Session 16: RoaA - time to proof-read and publish

Teacher to model proof-reading and correcting spelling using the resources available. Children to independently proof-read.

Provide time for the children to publish their stories ready for them to be reproduced and sold at the Summer Fayre.

Session 14: In the role of the editor

Hand your manuscript to the editor! Children swap their stories. The 'editor' must write a letter to the author telling them the parts they enjoyed and the areas they feel they could develop further. Consider: Is the story interesting/ engaging? Could you follow it? Are the characters' actions and dialogue always believable? Has the author varied their sentence structures enough in order to engage? Are any areas they could develop?

Teacher to act as second editor – add a P.S. on to the letter with any further views.