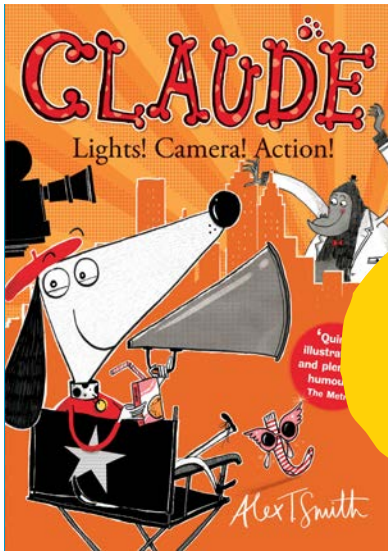


AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR MASTERCLASSES

NOTES FOR TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS

ALEX T. SMITH: HOW TO BE A STORY DETECTIVE



BEFORE WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

GET IN THE ZONE!

In his video, Alex explains that stories always start with an idea but sometimes ideas are really hard to find. He says that, to be a writer, you need to be a **STORY DETECTIVE!**

It's time to ask pupils to become story detectives for the day! First of all, push all of the tables and chairs to the perimeter of the classroom – giving children space to move around. Transform each table into a different 'station' or detective 'checkpoint'. On each checkpoint, put a single, coloured sheet of paper, a 'feeling card' with an emotion written on it, and a different classroom object (e.g. a rubber, a ruler, a whiteboard pen, an exercise book). To make it even more immersive, perhaps play some music to create a distinct atmosphere.

Ask pupils to walk around the room and make creative connections between (even the most mundane) objects, colours and feelings. Do they spark any interesting ideas for a story? When children sit down, give them 10–15 minutes to note down their ideas. They could even be challenged to create a character for their story, based on their own experiences during their task, or their observations of another classmate!

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you tell that Claude is **surprised** by the 'giant gorilla, in a dressing gown, drinking a cup of tea'? How does the illustration and the way that Alex T. Smith has organised the words on pages 18–19 help to show you Claude's feelings?
2. How does Alex create **comedy** when he describes Claude's reactions on page 20?
3. What **technique** does Alex use on page 22 to show how the washing line has fallen down? Why is this effective?
4. Can you find examples of **slapstick humour** in the extract? How might you describe Claude as 'clumsy'? Pick out key words and phrases from the text.
5. What is notable about the **names** of the characters on page 29? Do they make you laugh? Why?
6. What does Claude find out about the gorilla by the end of the extract? How is this an interesting development for the story? How does it create intrigue and **mystery** and make you want to read on?

FUN ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: CREATING MYSTERY

Alex T. Smith's stories are full of intrigue and excitement. In his video, he explains that something exciting always needs to happen in a story – like solving a mystery!

- Re-read the extract from *Claude: Lights! Camera! Action!* – this time focusing only on how Alex creates a sense of mystery, and how this might contrast with the humour in the story.
- As you read, create a mystery graph on which you plot the moments of mystery in the extract. For example, the beginning of the extract, when Claude discovers the gorilla, is a high point of mystery.
- In groups, re-enact the most mysterious scenes in the extract according to your graphs.

ACTIVITY 2: OVERHEARD CONVERSATIONS

Alex says that he is constantly on the lookout for details to add to his stories. He is always listening to conversations going on around him to get inspiration!

- Make it your mission to capture people having conversations while you are on your way to school, traveling either by car, by bus, by train or by foot! Using a notebook, jot down the interesting things people say to each other, as well as how they say it.
- Turn your little snippets of overheard conversations into examples of dialogue. Write them down and read them out with a partner. Do they sound more authentic than anything you might just 'make up'?

ACTIVITY 3: LEAVING STORIES BEHIND IN THE CLASSROOM...

In his video, Alex explains that he loved stories from a young age. He wrote his first detective story when he was six! His Grandad used to write him stories every day and leave them for him when he came home from school. It was this that got him hooked.

- Write a short story of only 50 words every day, at the end of the school day, for one week. Your stories can be based on things that happen to you during the school day, or they can be complex fantasies entirely out of your imagination! Remember though, you only have 50 words...
- Leave your short story in the classroom for someone else to find when they take their seats the next morning – just like Alex's Grandad used to do for him!
- Read the short stories that you find out loud and share them with your classmates. Can you guess who wrote your story? Do your classmates have their own individual writing styles?

SHARE A STORY

Turn into a story detective to find your favourite books that create a sense of mystery or intrigue. What are your favourite mystery and adventure stories or characters? Take ten minutes to share them with your friends, teachers, classmates and family members. If you could create a brand new detective-type character who would it be? What would he or she be like? What mystery would he or she solve? In what ways would your new character be inspired by another character from a book that you have already read?

SPARK YOUR IMAGINATION...

AN INSPIRING SHARE A STORY CHALLENGE FOR YOU:

Including a quick recap of the expert advice from Alex:

Look and listen to the world around you. Note down anything you see or hear that interests you and then turn it into a story.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are more fascinating Masterclass films and resources featuring amazing authors and illustrators over at worldbookday.com/online-masterclasses. Don't miss out, download them today!