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AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR MASTERCLASSES

NOTES FOR TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS

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ABI ELPHINSTONE, ROBIN STEVENS, & KIRAN MILLWOOD HARGRAVE: FINDING INSPIRATION



BEFORE WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

GET IN THE ZONE!

In the video, Abi Elphinstone explains that all you need to write a story is an idea that nobody else has stumbled across yet – but how can you find these ideas? It's time to find your inspiration!

Encourage students to get their creative juices flowing with the Creative Writing Hats! Bring three hats (or boxes) into the classroom. In hat 1, put bits of scrap paper with different objects written on them (e.g. a broken wristwatch, a taxi, a stolen ring, peppermints, a pair of binoculars). In hat 2, put bits of scrap paper with locations written on them (e.g. a forbidden forest, a balcony, a sunlit park,

a beach, a cave). In hat 3, put bits of scrap paper with characters written on them (e.g. identical twins, a shopkeeper, an old enemy, a magician, a sinister stranger). One by one, invite students to come to the front and choose a piece of scrap paper from each hat (one object, one location and one character). Give them 5–10 minutes to come up with some initial ideas for a story, and maybe even to write the opening line!

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO AND READING THE EXTRACT:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the Prologue of *Sky Song* by Abi Elphinstone, what do you learn about the kingdom of Erkenwald?
2. In what three ways do the people of Erkenwald learn to use magic? How does Abi Elphinstone create a sense of 'magic' through her use of **descriptive language**? Pick out key words and phrases.
3. What is the relationship between the narrator and Daisy in the extract from *Death in the Spotlight* by Robin Stevens? How do you know?
4. How does Robin Stevens **create suspense** when the characters go down into the well room?
5. 'Winter' is presented as a **character** in the first chapter of *The Way Past Winter* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
6. Can you see any similarities between the Prologue of *Sky Song* and the first chapter of *The Way Past Winter*? What are they?

FUN ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: GOING ON AN ADVENTURE – MAPPING STORIES

Abi Elphinstone describes how she likes to find her ideas and inspiration through going on adventures – from living with *Kazagh Eagle Hunters in Mongolia* to exploring the Scottish coastline where she grew up!

- Think of a time when you have had an adventure. It might be in a foreign place with your family, or it might be in your local town or city (or even your school) with a group of friends. Share your adventure with the person sitting next to you or with the whole class.
- Draw a map of the route that you took on your adventure, taking into account any places that you stopped to rest, or anything significant that you stumbled across. Annotate and label your map with important landmarks. Design your map to make your adventure come to life on the page.

ACTIVITY 2: CREATING A CRIME SCENE

Robin Stevens starts her writing process by thinking about a place to commit a crime; in fact, she often takes real places and turns them into fictional locations for her stories.

- Be inspired to turn into a story detective in this classroom crime scene game! In small groups, analyse and make notes about various bits of evidence placed on different tables around the room. Evidence might include: the outline of a body, a handwritten note or letter, a broken pair of glasses, a bottle, partially eaten food. Fake police tape around the room to create atmosphere.
- Walk around the room and take notes about what you see – but be careful not to touch anything.
- After gathering your notes, use inspiration from Robin Stevens to turn them into a suspenseful story!

ACTIVITY 3: REIMAGINING FAIRYTALE CHARACTERS

Kiran Millwood Hargrave looks further afield – to other cultures – to find ideas for her stories. In the video she reveals her love of fairytales, especially Russian fairytales, for providing inspiration.

- Play the ‘Who Am I?’ fairytale game: think of a character from a fairytale and come up to the front of the class. Your classmates must then ask you a yes or no question to discover which character you are playing. Examples of questions to ask include: ‘Are you human?’ ‘Are you magical?’ etc.
- Create some background music to accompany various fairytale characters. Examples might include drums for authoritative characters; something dark and sinister for evil characters; and something light and bright for good characters. Play these musical themes as prompts when you role-play the various characters. How can you put a twist on your chosen fairytale character to bring them into the modern world? Create a social media profile for a fairytale character of your choice.

SHARE A STORY

Think of a story that has inspired you. How has it inspired you? Did it make you think of any new ideas for your own writing? Create a decorative map showing the ideas in the story and how they influenced you or your creative writing. Spend ten minutes sharing your story and story map with your family and friends.

SPARK YOUR IMAGINATION

AN INSPIRING SHARE A STORY CHALLENGE FOR YOU:

Including a quick recap of the expert advice from Abi, Kiran and Robin:

Abi Elphinstone: Collect everyday objects such as keys, a magnifying glass or a pen, and give them each a magical quality to get inspiration for your story.

Robin Stevens: Think of somewhere you’ve been and use that setting to create a crime scene in a story.

Kiran Millwood Hargrave: Research a story from another culture and rewrite it from the villain’s point of view.

DID YOU KNOW?

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