

DIY CPD for Writing For Pleasure

2. Getting to know the children

This is the second of a series of blogs, written by a teacher for teachers, aimed at helping you prepare yourself as a *Writing For Pleasure* practitioner. This particular blog asks you to think about **all** of the children in your class and their own interests and experiences so that you can better understand them as individuals and their writerly identities.

In Donald Graves' book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, he says 'I think I know students [...] until I challenge myself to write their names from memory'. When he would ask teachers to do the same, 'most had some blanks'. He would do a memory activity (see the task below) with teachers as a way to get them thinking about their pupils - in particular about the 'missing children' who were not remembered - and write down the particular interests and knowledge funds of *every child* in the class.

After you have met your new class for the first time – and hopefully this has happened before the end of the Summer term - try out a memory activity, like that suggested by Graves. Without knowing the children well enough in the first place, our teaching will not be as good as it could be. Make this a priority - try this now and keep doing this memory task once you're with the class from September - at least once a half-term but preferably more often.

Task 2: Test yourself to remember all of the children's names in your class & list their experiences and interests. 10 mins each time.

See the appendix for a blank version that can be copied.

When you do this, it is so important to check afterwards and draw a line to show the bottom of your list and then **write down the names of all the children you did not remember** below this line.

You will find out lots about what the children enjoy, know and spend time thinking about from informal conversations, in items they bring to school or during sharing times (as well as from the next task).

Put an X in the 'confirmed' column when their experiences and interests that you think they have are confirmed during such opportunities from September onwards.

Date 20/7/22

Class Ash Class 2022-23

29 Number of children in class

9 Number of children remembered

FIRST MEMORY ATTEMPT

Child's name	Experiences and interests	Confirmed
Anayah F.	Loves cats, uncle v unwell	X
Eddie B.	Pokemon	X
Mustafa H.		
Freya C.	?	
Charlie B.	Arsenal FC, Dog Man books	
Eugayya B.	Swimming!	X
Jason	Sea life, sharks	X
Maya	Dad in hospital	X
Joshua B.	Collects Pokemon cards	X
Max		
Amber		
Shame		
Casper		
Dante		
Jonathan		
Bella		
Ada		
Amara		
Owyn		
Vanessa		
Giulia		
Hewan		
Christine		
Aisha		
Sulayman		

Each time you do this, compare how your understanding of the children's experiences and interests changes and keep reflecting upon which children you still don't remember (and why that might be). Those children should (must) become your priority.

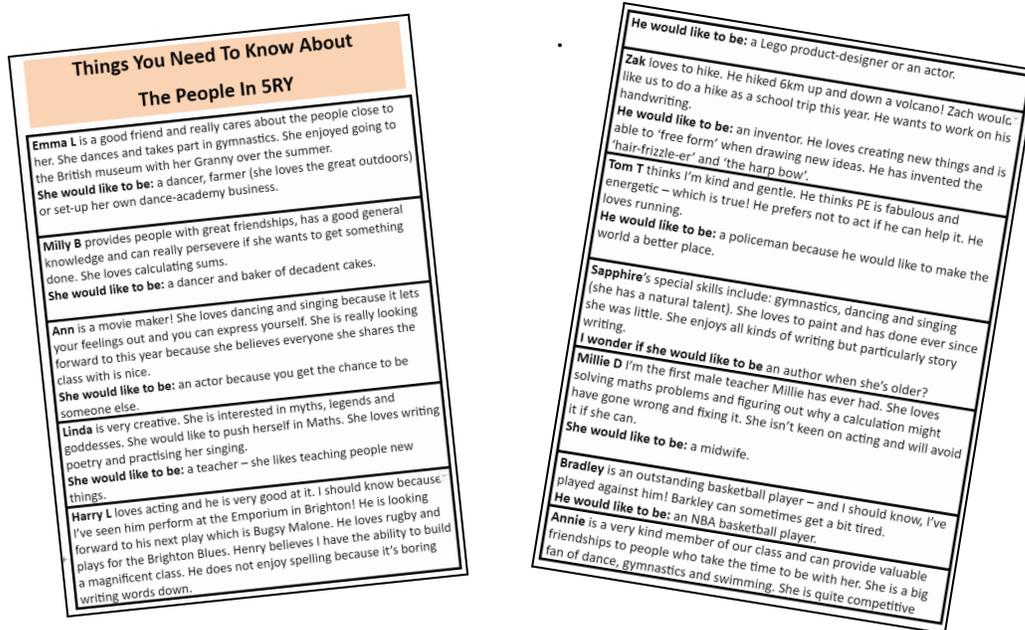
Those children for whom it is most difficult to come up with a territory or information are those who need it most. They are often the children who find it difficult to choose topics, to locate a territory of their own. They perceive themselves as non-knowers, persons without turf, with no place to stand. Such an exercise works on a child's voice, and begins the oral process of authenticating experience.

From Writing: Teachers & Children at Work (Graves 1983 p.22)

When the new academic year begins, you can also ask the children directly about their interests and experiences (see the suggested proforma in the appendix) and use what the children tell you in order to create a document such as a 'Things You Need to Know About [insert class name]' book, which you could laminate and put into the class library for the children to read.

Task 3: Survey the children about themselves and their interests. With their permission, use this to create a 'Things You Need to Know About....' book for the class library. 10 mins for survey; between 45-60 mins to create class book.

See the appendix for the blank survey. This can be easily adapted for younger children, such as for those in KS1.



Along with your own writing river and reflections upon yourself as a writer and teaching of writing (see the previous blog in this series, [DIY CPD for Writing for Pleasure 1. Being a Writer-Teacher](#)), you will know yourself and your pupils better and therefore be an even better teacher.

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With huge thanks to the late Donald Graves and his lasting inspiration.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU SURVEY

Please answer these questions as honestly and truthfully as you can, so that I can get to know you and teach you better!

Tick the box on the right if you would be **happy to share this information** with the rest of the class.

What do you like about yourself?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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Is there anything you would like me to know about you?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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What do you really enjoy doing or are interested in?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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How do you think your friends would describe you?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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What do you dislike?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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What would you like to do or be in the future?		<input type="checkbox"/>
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