

Stepping out of the story

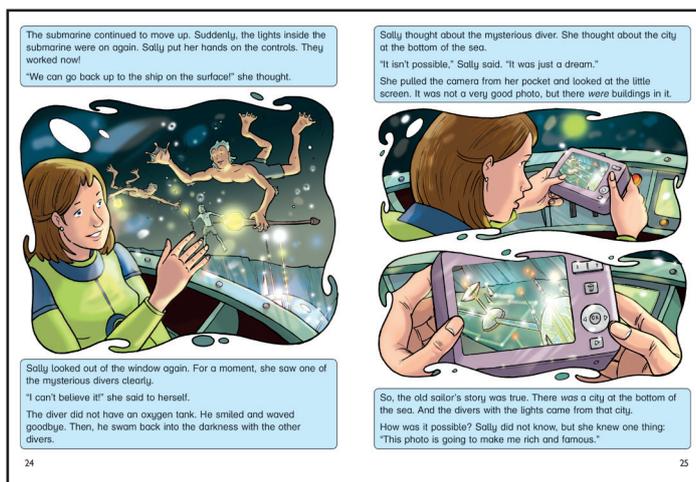
The activities that follow are designed for more confident readers. Children use the story as a starting point for creating their own drama. This helps them to understand the plot and the story characters and their motivations. It also teaches children how to improvise – an important acting (and speaking) skill.

Thoughts and motivations

Decision time  (confident readers, aged 8–12)

Aim: to help children to understand crucial moments in the plot of the Reader.

Most Readers contain turning points in the plot where a character has to make a difficult decision. For example, in [The Deep: The City Under the Sea](#) (*Macmillan Children's Readers*, Level 6), one of the characters, Sally, finds an amazing city deep under the sea. Sally takes a photo from a submarine, but when she gets back to the surface, she faces a dilemma. Should she delete the photo or should she show it to the world? If she tells the world about the city under the sea, she will be famous. But what will happen to the people in the city? For them, life will never be the same again.



The Deep: The City Under the Sea

- 1 Listen to the story together as a class but stop the recording at the point where the key character has to make a difficult decision.
- 2 Discuss the scene together, including the decision to be made and any options that the character has. For example, in the story above, Sally could:
 - Keep the photo but not show it to anyone.
 - Show the photo to Dr Shaw.
 - Tell the world about the city under the sea.
 - Delete the photo.
- 3 Ask one child to be the story character. Then divide the rest of the class into groups to represent the actions that this character could take. For example in the story above, the class could be divided into groups which are for or against Sally showing people the photo. Each group thinks of reasons for or against doing this. For example:
 - You will be rich and famous.
 - The people under the sea want to be left alone.
 - The people helped you. Now you must help them.
 - This is an important discovery. You must tell people about it.
 - Think of the people in the city, and not yourself.
- 4 Ask children in each group to write down one reason each on a piece of paper. Then ask each group to stand in a line on opposite sides of the classroom, holding their pieces of paper.

- The child who plays the character should walk up and down between the two lines, pretending to think deeply, while children on both sides call out their arguments. Point to children so that they take turns to call out arguments, minimizing class noise. It does not matter if children repeat the same arguments.
- When all the children have had a turn at persuading the story character, ask the character to decide what to do. The character makes a decision by joining one of the two groups.

Improvisation

Outside the story (confident readers, aged 8–12)

Aim: to practise writing and acting out a new scene.

Most Readers will refer to events that we don't actually see in the story, such as telling us what has happened before the tale begins or saying that the characters 'got married' or 'lived happily' at the end of the story. These kinds of lines provide opportunities for children to write a new scene, taking the lines as a starting point. Here's one example:

- The story in [Lights, Camera, Action! On Location](#) (*Macmillan Children's Readers*, Level 4) is about children rehearsing and filming a short film script, and later becoming famous actors. In the story, we read the first two lines from the children's own film script:

Anna Wait Sunil! Please don't go.

Charlie I need to, Mary. My life is in danger.

Write these lines on the board.

- Discuss different situations where people might say these lines, and make a list on the board. For example, why is Sunil's life in danger?
- In pairs, children use the lines on the board to write a new, one-minute script. They can refer to the situations on the board or invent a new situation.
- Pairs of children perform their mini-plays in front of the class.
- Discuss the differences and similarities between children's mini-plays. How many different types of story have the class produced from those two lines?

Alternatively, if you have a strong class, this activity can be done as a pre-reading activity before children start the story. Choose the title page of the story or an illustration from inside the story, and brainstorm what the story might be about. Then ask children to write a one-minute script, as above.



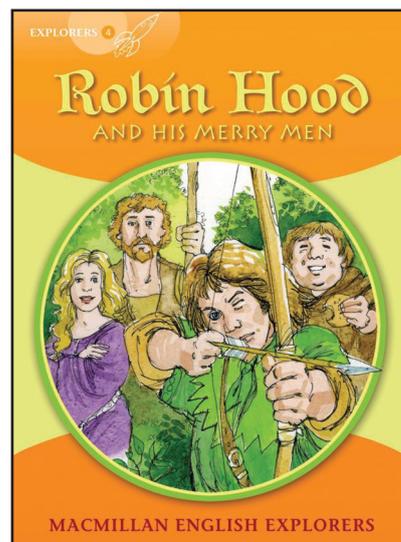
Lights, Camera, Action! On Location

Paired improvisation (confident readers, aged 8–12)

Aim: to get to know the story characters better and learn how to write a scene.

Most Readers contain characters with very different personalities, such as Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham, from [Robin Hood](#) (*Explorers*, Level 4). This activity teaches children to improvise new scenes for such characters. It should be done after the children have read the whole story or at least know both characters well.

- 1 Ask children to imagine that two very different characters from their story, such as enemies, meet by chance. Explain that this is a new scene that is not in the Reader.
- 2 Discuss the following points:
 - What each character is doing when they meet. For example, are they shopping in a market or walking along the street?
 - How each character might feel. For example, is one character scared of the other?
 - What each character might say and do. For example, do they argue or fight?
- 3 Divide the class into groups of three, to include the principal two actors and one narrator. In their groups ask children to write a new scene involving the story characters. This should include narration, actions and a few lines of dialogue for each character.
- 4 Children practise their scene, then perform it in front of the class.

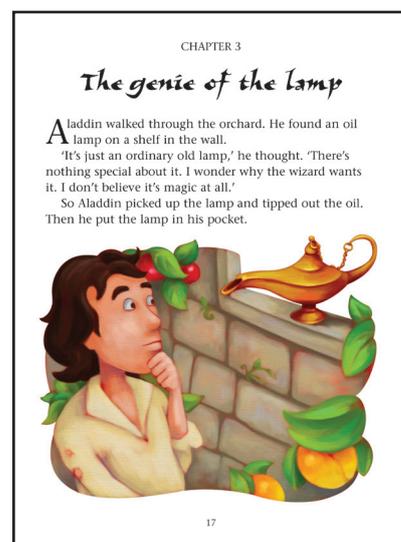


Give me a voice (confident speakers, aged 8–12)

Aim: to develop children's imagination; to view a story from a different perspective.

Many Readers will contain an important inanimate object, such as the lamp in [Aladdin](#) (*Explorers*, Level 5).

- 1 Tell children that they are going to look at the story from the point of view of an object which is important to the story. Explain that the object has thoughts and feelings. The object is going to tell the story from its point of view.
- 2 In groups, ask children to imagine what the object can see and feel at an important point in the story. Brainstorm things that the object might say if it had a voice.
- 3 Children write narrator's lines for the scene, explaining, in the object's own words, what is happening.
- 4 Children practise acting out the scene, with the object narrating the action.
- 5 Children act out their scenes in class.



Aladdin

The next scene  (confident readers, aged 8–12)

Aim: to help children to focus on the plot of the Reader and make predictions.

- 1 Select a part of your Reader where something dramatic is about to happen. For example, this page from [Pumpkins: A Pie for Miss Potter](#) (*Macmillan Children's Readers*, Level 5), which shows Miss Potter about to have a big surprise.
- 2 With books closed, play the audio for the story, stopping it at the crucial moment.
- 3 Brainstorm what might happen next.
- 4 Divide the class into groups to include the principal actors and a narrator. In their groups ask children to write a new scene showing what happens next. This should include narration, actions and a few lines of dialogue.
- 5 Children practise their new scene, then perform it in front of the class.



Pumpkins: A Pie for Miss Potter