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TELL ME A DRAGON

by JACKIE MORRIS

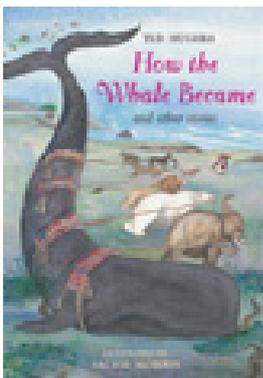
TEACHERS' NOTES

by PIE CORBETT

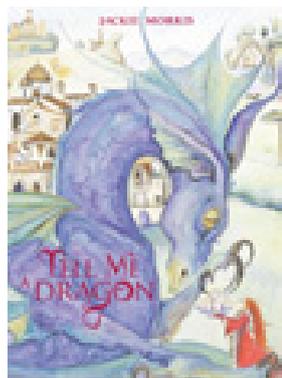
These Teachers' Notes have been specially written by Pie Corbett to assist teachers and librarians in the promotion and teaching of *Tell Me a Dragon* by Jackie Morris in schools and to help foster a love of good books, literature and reading in children.

JACKIE MORRIS writes and paints in a cottage by the sea in Pembrokeshire, Wales. She has written and illustrated 18 books for Frances Lincoln Children's Books. For more on her life and work visit: www.jackiemorris.co.uk

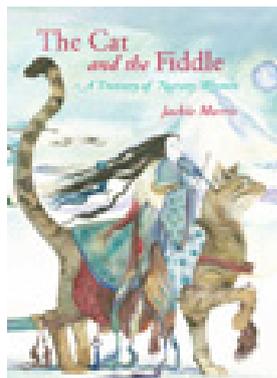
PIE CORBETT works with schools around the world, developing imaginative teaching programmes. He was made an Honorary Doctor of Letters for services to poetry, storytelling and creative teaching by the University of Winchester. His poetry collection 'Evidence of Dragons' (Macmillan Children's Books) also features poems about dragons! Find out more about his work in schools using 'talk for writing' by logging on to: www.talk4writing.co.uk



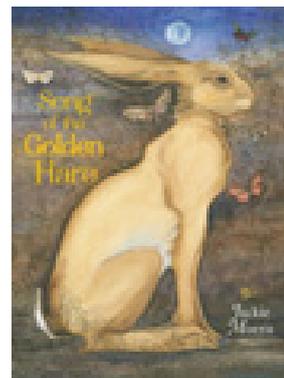
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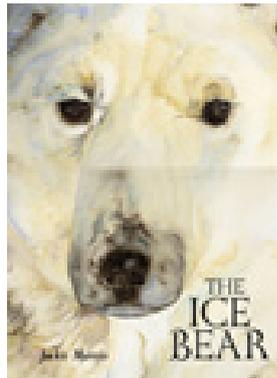
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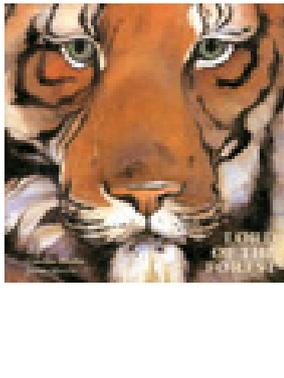
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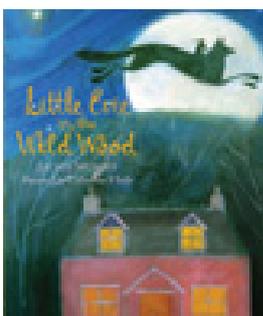
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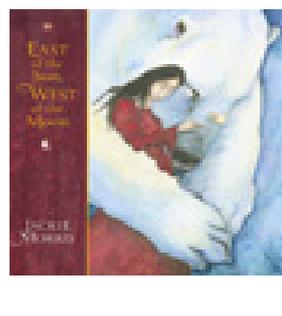
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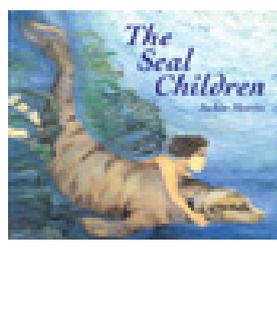
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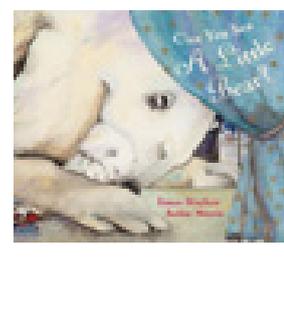
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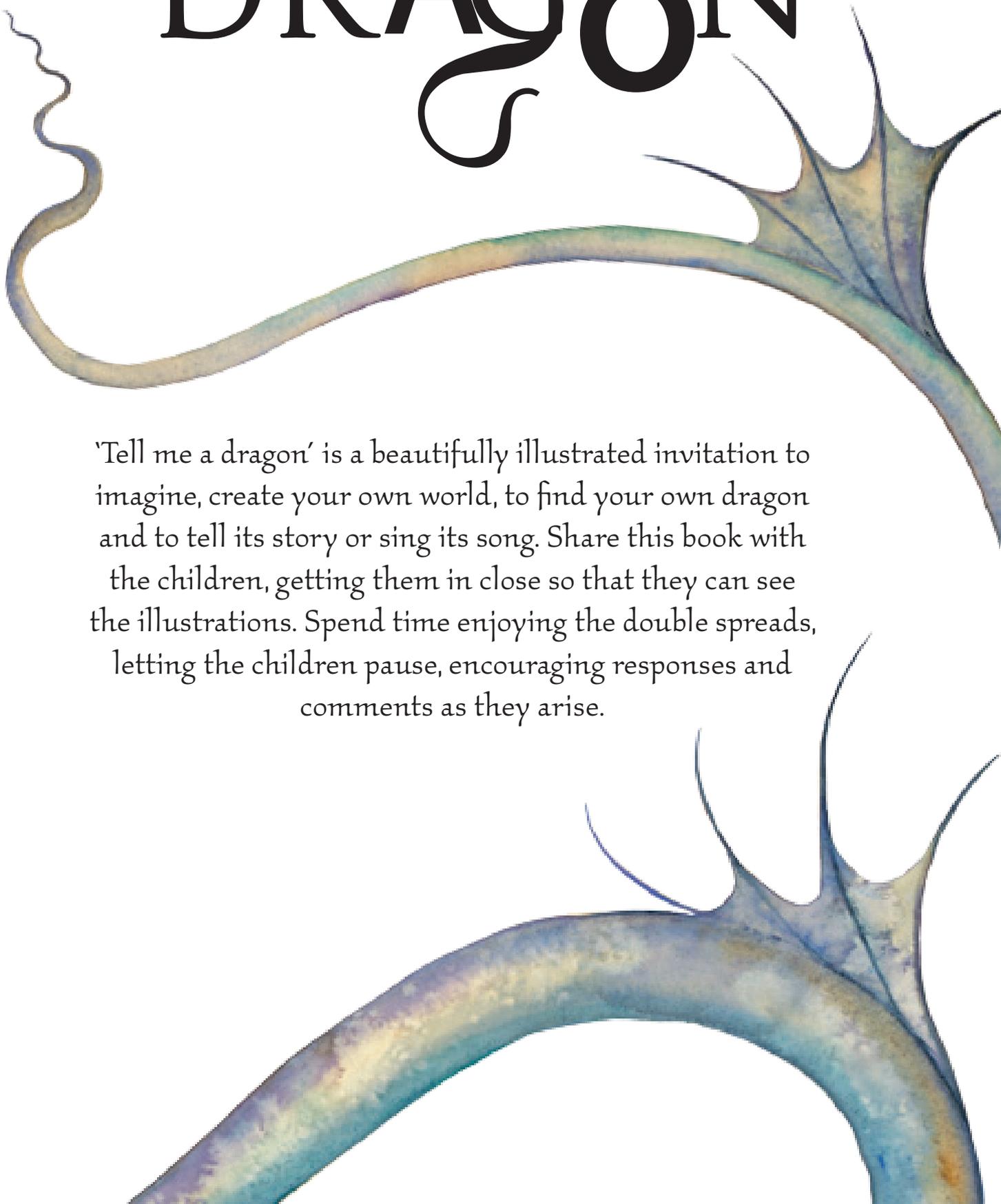
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A DRAGON

'Tell me a dragon' is a beautifully illustrated invitation to imagine, create your own world, to find your own dragon and to tell its story or sing its song. Share this book with the children, getting them in close so that they can see the illustrations. Spend time enjoying the double spreads, letting the children pause, encouraging responses and comments as they arise.

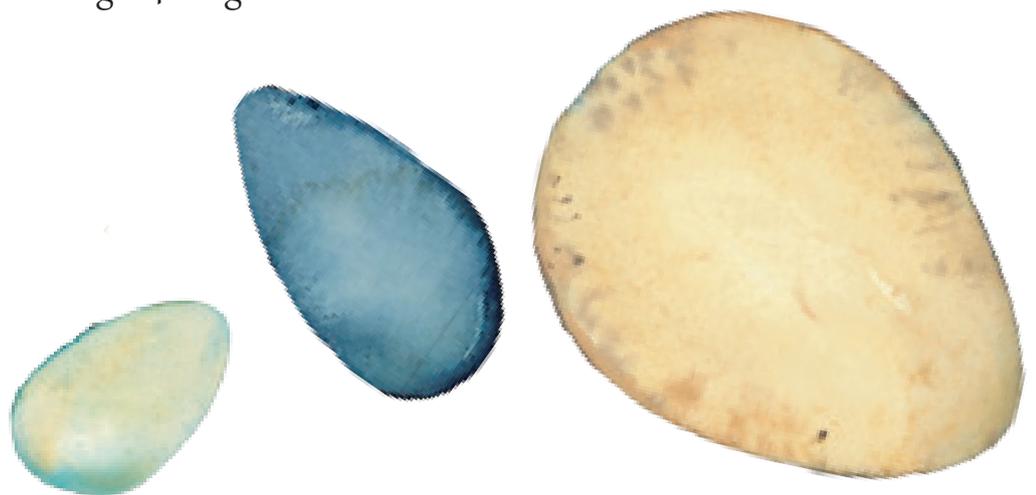
Initial reading – tasting the book

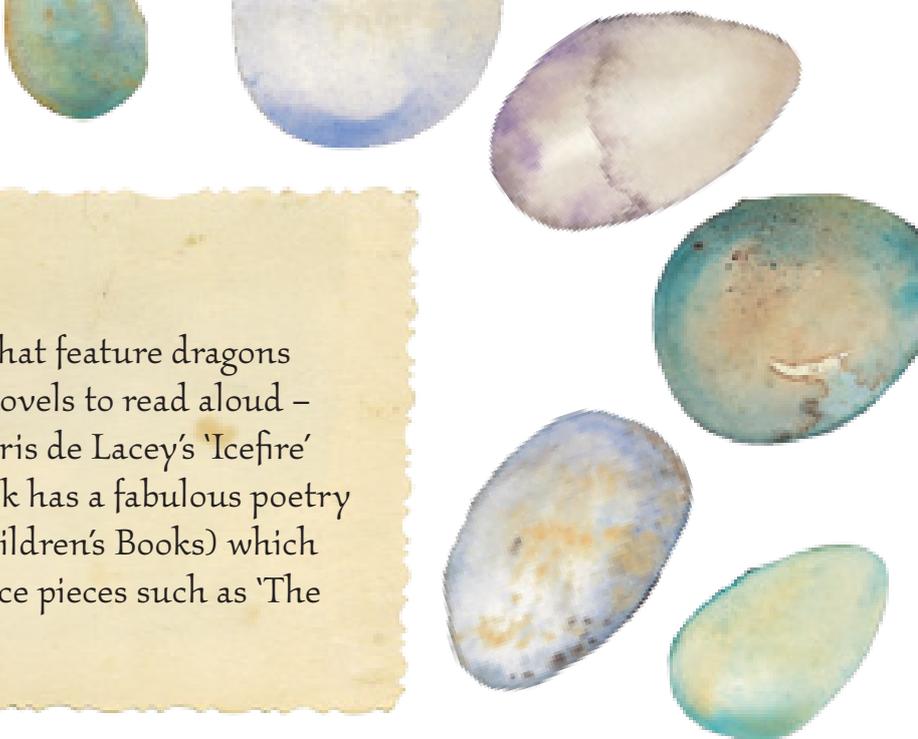
Try beginning by discussing the title – why might it be called, 'Tell me a dragon'? What else might it have been called? Talk about each dragon and how its appearance relates to its 'type' or name – what do the children think? I would ask the children to choose and describe their favourite dragon. What about their chosen dragon appeals? Ask them to give their favourite a name and then to talk in pairs – what does their dragon look like, where does it live and how does it behave? Compare the pebbles at the front with the final spread which shows the dragons hatching out. Which one is theirs?

Creating a dragon world

In class, I'd begin by designing a huge 'dragon world'. Look carefully at how Jackie draws background landscapes – rolling hills and cities, complete with turrets, towers and castles. This could be drawn onto 'lining paper' (Wilkinsons sell stout rolls for £2) so that you can create a dragon world that is several metres long. This is the background for exploring the book and creating new dragons. Dragons from the book and their landscapes could be mapped onto the collage but new dragons should also be added.

As a class, create a collage of dragon eggs. Collect pebbles and draw dragons on each pebble or name the dragon and write the name on the pebble. Varnish to give the pebbles a shine and to protect them. Display the 'pebbles' in a dragon's nest which the children could build. Now move on to using Jackie's images to help design, draw and paint their own dragon. Model this first. Whilst this work is being carried out, dragon masks might be made as well as beautiful drawings and paintings of dragons.





Other dragon books

There are various other books that feature dragons which would make good class novels to read aloud – ranging from *The Hobbit* to Chris de Lacey's 'Icefire' series (icefire.co.uk). Nick Toczek has a fabulous poetry book 'Dragons!' (Macmillan Children's Books) which includes some great performance pieces such as 'The Dragon Who Ate Our School'.

Go on a Dragon Hunt

If the weather is suitable, take the children out on a dragon hunt. You could prepare for this by actually hiding clues such as a dragon's shell or scales. Several years ago, I accompanied children from Stone-with-Woodford Primary School on such an outing. First we visited Chepstow castle and then went on to the sculpture trail in the Forest of Dean. The first sculpture is an enormous 'giant's chair'. This made an ideal place for a dragon story. Finally, we made our way to Clearwell caves.

The children took their 'writing journals' with them as they looked for clues and soaked up the atmosphere. These experiences were intended as a precursor to writing their dragon stories – after all, how can you write a story with a heroine entering a dragon's cave if you have never been into a cave? First hand experiences help to build the imagination with possibilities.

Dragon Sighted!

A dramatic way to begin a sequence of dragon work would be by announcing that a dragon has been sighted in the area. You could mock up a local newspaper headline or record a news bulletin. There are 3 useful clips on YOUTUBE which show dragons being spotted in America that make a dramatic start (*Dragons sighted in skies over Louisville*).

The children can be in role as Dragonologists. What signs might be seen locally if a dragon had moved into the neighbourhood? List ideas, e.g. *burnt bushes, missing cats and dogs, scratch marks on trees, dragon dung....*

Create your dragon world

An imaginative approach would be to create a fantasy DRAGON WORLD. As suggested, start by drawing the map of the world – it can have a distant mountain, dwarf mines, waterfalls, magical pools, lonely towers... this will be used by the children to develop their dragon landscape and make it seem real. Next, they create their own 'dragon passports', designing their own pet dragon.

Dragon Passport

Name: *Xellios*

Age: *600 years*

Address: *Forest End,
Mount Scalia.*

Distinguishing marks:
*Green scales, blue tail and
yellow spots.*

Food: *Vegetarian - eats all
vegetables and fruit.*

Abilities: *Flies, breathes
fire and can read minds.*



Supposing the dragon goes missing? The children might then design a 'wanted' poster to try and find their young dragon. This will need to explain what their pet looks like, where it might be found, what to do if you see it and whom to contact:

MISSING - ONE DRAGON!

Missing girl dragon Irana has green scales and a long red tail. She is smaller than a Shetland pony and cannot be missed because she has yellow spots on her back. Irana's claws are silvery but she keeps them sheathed at all times.

Irana is a gentle young dragon and will only breathe fire if cornered. She eats plants and loves fruits and vegetables. You may only see her at dawn and after sunset because she is shy.

Beware of approaching her from behind as this might scare her. If you spot her do not get too close until you have gained her trust. Contact Wizard Holly if you find her.

REWARD 50 GOLDEN GEMSTONES.

Holly, year 4.



What sort of dragon is it?

Still in-role as dragonologists, explain that you have been approached by the editors of 'Dragons of the British Isles'. To write an entry, look at a sample.

THE NEWCASTLE FOREST DRAGON

The Newcastle Forest Dragon is a rare form of dragon which is only seen near vegetation and at dusk.

Forest dragons are easy to identify as they are the smallest dragon in the British Isles. They are the size of a cat and are covered in shiny scales. The adult Forest dragon is a dark green colour which enables it to hide in trees and tall grass. However, juveniles are born with a yellowish tinge.

Forest dragons are found across the city of Newcastle, especially in parks and gardens where they feel safest. They nest in fir trees and because they only fly at night are very rarely seen.

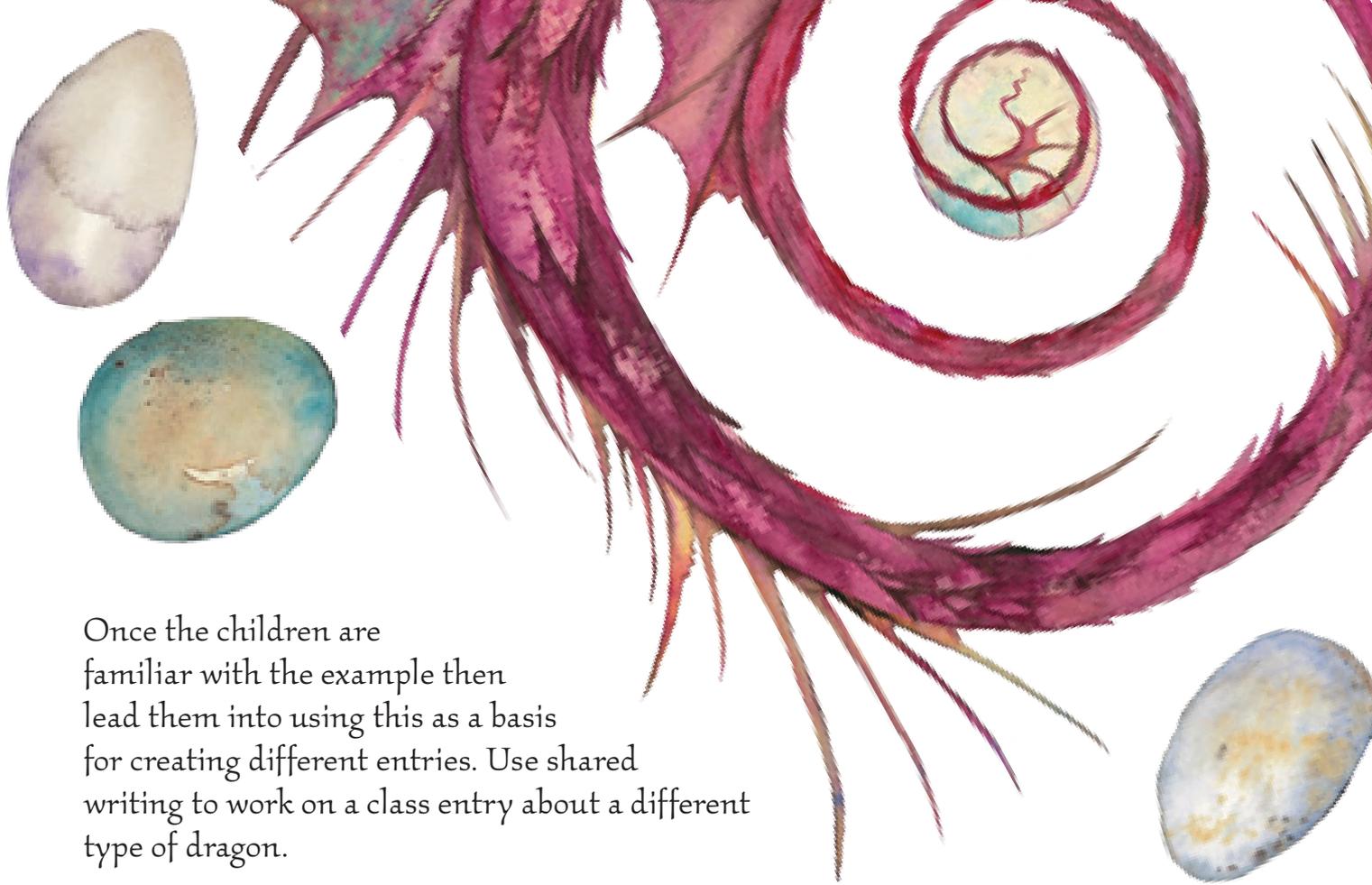
Whilst most dragons are renowned for hoarding treasure, the Forest dragon shows no interest in gold, silver or any valuable stones. They are only

interested in playing chess and several Forest dragons have become world champions.

These shy and gentle creatures are vegetarians and whilst their breath is warm, they do not breathe fire. Forest dragons present no danger to humans and indeed, some have been tamed as household pets.

Dragonologists have been concerned for many years that Forest dragons might be mistaken for other species and therefore become hunted. Where nests have been discovered, their location is kept secret.

To preserve these mysterious and beautiful creatures, all dragon lovers should make sure that vegetable peelings, as well as hay, should be left out during snowy weather. It would be disastrous if another species of dragon became extinct.



Once the children are familiar with the example then lead them into using this as a basis for creating different entries. Use shared writing to work on a class entry about a different type of dragon.

Look at the different dragons in the book 'Tell Me a Dragon' and start by getting each child to invent a name for their dragon, e.g. *a stone dragon, a cloud dragon, a snow dragon, a tree dragon, the lesser-backed blue dragon, the miniature rain dragon, etc.* It helps the children if they begin by making a passport for their chosen type of dragon, as seen on the previous page – its name, weight, food, habitat, etc. The passport should have a labelled drawing of the dragon, identifying key aspects such as wings, scales, claws, tail. Dragons should also be painted using water colours, studying the approach that Jackie uses. Draw similar outlines, innovating on her patterns.

Before writing, the children need to have thought about the key aspects – what is their type of dragon called, what do they look like, where are they generally found, what do they eat, key aspects of their lifestyle and so forth.

Their reports can be made into a class 'Guide to dragons of the British Isles', organised alphabetically. Entries might be enhanced by boxes with key facts, glossaries and diagrams. An ideal model for this work would be to look at the popular book, 'Dragonology' (Templar Publishing), who also publish 'Working with Dragons' as well as 'Tracking and Training Dragons'. Check out their website for video clips, 'www.dragonology.com'. The children could also try explaining how a dragon's fire-breathing mechanism works!

How to trap the dragon

Of course, if the dragons become too mischievous then the class may have to consider designing dragon traps. Let the children work in pairs to prepare ideas. Make a class list of key suggestions – they usually fall into common patterns such as *netting the dragon*, *using poison* or *building a trap*. Everyone might be in-role as local people attending a meeting. Suggestions and questions could be taken from the floor and a vote for the best method taken. Ideas could then be written up as a set of instructions, 'how to trap the Lesser-spotted Bristol Thunderer'.

So – what is the dragon's story?

Let the children create their own illustrated story about their chosen dragon. They will need to think about where the dragon is and who finds it. What happens next? What is the main problem?

I always find it works best if children can draw their story first as a story map. Then they use this to retell their story several times so that the tale begins to grow. Then they move into writing. Here are some possibilities for a dozen 'dragon story ideas':

- the dragon is trapped – tell the story of how you find it and help it escape;
- the dragon is attacking the town – how can it be defeated;
- you are on a journey and get lost – a mist dragon helps you find your way, overcoming many obstacles;
- you have a dream with a dragon in it – you wake up and the dragon is real but it is scary;
- dragons are very rare and you find one – how do you protect it from collectors;
- you find a dragon's egg but someone else is looking for it and means to destroy it;
- you are a dragon rider and together you have to travel to find a magic potion to cure the king;
- you find a lonely dragon and make friends with it but it gets caught in a trap by hunters and you have to release it;
- write the legend of 'the dragon that fought St George – the truth!';
- you find a baby dragon and tame it but it escapes and you have to find it;

- you are warned by the dragon master not to go looking for the Red Arrow Dragon but you do, you find it and... discover why you were told not to seek it out;
- you find a magical portal into a dragon world – you save a dragon from being cruelly treated and befriend it – eventually you bring it back to this world but have to keep it a secret.

Dragon descriptions and poems.

Use the pictures in the book for short-burst descriptive writing. To do this, you will need to use powerful descriptive language, drawing on imagery to create a vivid picture for the reader. A simple way to tackle the description would be to write a descriptive line for different parts of the dragon, e.g. eyes, tail, teeth, jaws, talons, wings, etc.

A simple starting point is to draw a dragon and annotate it with words and images to describe different parts of the dragon. Now make a simple list of parts of the dragon's body – head, eyes, scales, claws, tail, etc. Use this as the basis for a simple poem in which you take each part of the dragon and create a simile, e.g.

*Eragon's **head***

Is bigger than a bus.

*His **eyes** shine*

Like scarlet headlamps.

*His **scales***

Are tougher than diamonds.

*Her **claws** curve*

Like crescent moons.

*Her jagged **tail** can knock*

Blocks of flats over

with one swipe...



I used this simple idea in Honiton Primary School with a year 5 class. We came up with this poem, using shared writing:

Xfilious

Its scarlet **eyes**
Scan the
Pitch undergrowth,
Like crystal flames
Flickering, curved like
A curious cave,
Possessed by mysteries.

Its jagged **jaws**
Crawl, grinding
Broken bones,
Shredding fascinating flesh!

Dagger **teeth**
Drip with venom
Drizzling disaster
Every stormy step it takes.

Scarred **scales**
Are like dreaded diamonds
Flexing, glistening in the
Moonlight,
Like shattered
Mirrors of misery.

Curved **talons** grip,
Illuminated menacingly
By stunned stars -
Crafted by brutal blades.

Scalpel **spines** slope,
Zigzagging wildly
Like a staircase of
Shark fins.

Crouching
At the monstrous mouth
Of its lethal lair,
Xfilious
Glares
Into the petrified eyes
Of darkness and
Whispers words of warning...



Look carefully at the dragon eggs in the book. Use these images to write a simple, playful list poem, imagining what sort of dragon the different eggs might contain, e.g. :

Dragon's Eggs.

*The scarlet egg contains
egg yolks, sunsets and pillar boxes of lava.*

*The blue egg contains
the sky behind clouds, quiet pools
and a Siamese cat's eye.*

*The silver egg contains
The mist off a moor
And the fur of a Siberian wolf....*



Try to make each idea special so that you do not just say a green egg is like 'grass' – but make the grass unique by saying what sort it is or where it came from, e.g. *the green egg contains/the grass from Wembley Stadium....*

Everyone knows that dragons like riddles. Decide on the answer to the riddle, e.g. *time, clock, night, silence, moon, feather*. Then make a list of what you know about the topic – what it is like, what it does, how it is used. Use these ideas to create an 'I am' riddle. Remember to provide clues but do not give too much away. Puns and plays on words can be useful. In this example the class brainstormed ideas about a feather.

Initial brainstorm of ideas

Soft
Used for flying
Birds have them
Tickles
Fragile
Light as a feather
Powerful flying

Riddle

I am soft as silk.
I have soared high
Above the hills
And yet you might touch me.
I will tickle you –
And though I am frail
And light as a spider's web
My power will
Take you to the highest peak.

To add extra depth to the children's writing, try experimenting with this idea. Make a list of different emotions such as happiness, sadness, jealousy, misery. Each of these becomes like a dragon lurking inside of you. Use the following pattern to write about your own feelings, e.g.

The dragons inside of me.

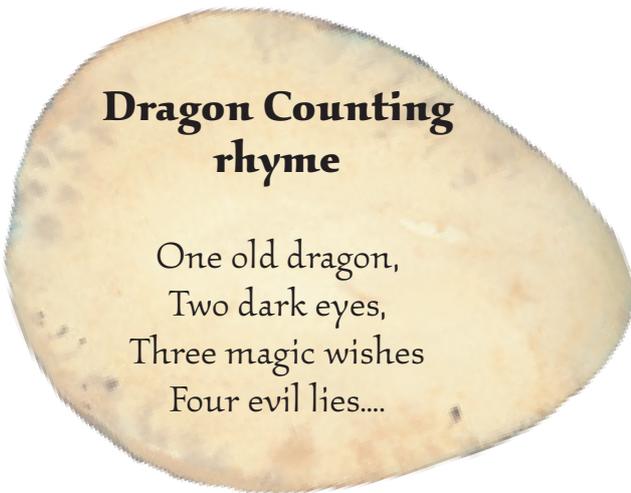
*Inside of me is an angry dragon
Who stomps from room to room.*

*Inside of me is a tired dragon
Who curls up asleep in the corner.*

*Inside of me is a wondering dragon
Who pauses and watches for thoughts drifting by.*

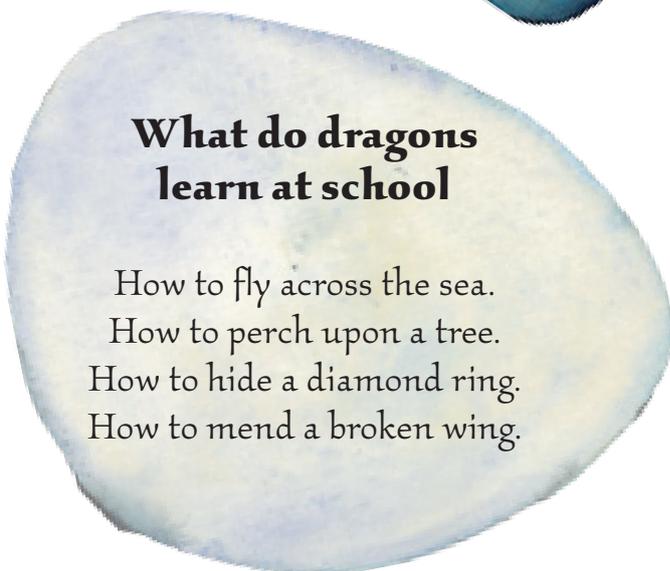
*Inside of me is a curious dragon
Who sticks his nose into everyone's business....*

Four more dragon ideas



Dragon Counting rhyme

One old dragon,
Two dark eyes,
Three magic wishes
Four evil lies....



What do dragons learn at school

How to fly across the sea.
How to perch upon a tree.
How to hide a diamond ring.
How to mend a broken wing.





Dragon Collective Nouns

A thunder of dragons
A crush of dragons
A roar of dragons....

A Dragon Alphabet

Angrily swooping on innocent towns,
Breathing fire on princess's gowns.
Catching cattle in jagged claws
Deafening villagers with mighty roars....

All of this work can be supplemented by reading dragon myths and legends as well as looking at Chinese dragons. The Komodo dragon is an enormous lizard but it is well worth hunting information down about this fearsome creature on the internet.

Over the last few years, Jackie Morris and I have been finding dragons around the country... they seem to be everywhere. Take 'Tell Me a Dragon' and dive into the invitation to invent stories, draw pictures and create new worlds, populated by beautiful and extraordinary creatures. Let your imagination loose.