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Foreword: Why I made this book

There are not many things more fulfilling than creating a story. It's your own world, full of your own ideas, your own characters, your own crazy (or funny, or terrifying, or heart-warming) situations – and all on your own terms.

Coming up with a story is like creating, experimenting and communicating all at the same time. Which is why it's so important for children, teens and adventurous adults to experience it.

Attention: you don't need to be an adult to enjoy this book! Young people of all ages can tap into this knowledge directly and make use of it to stun their parents, teachers and carers.

Throughout the book, I use examples from books and films to illustrate ideas. To be honest, I could have used *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter* and *The Lego Movie* for all of

them, but I've tried to use a wide variety of sources – most well-known and some lesser-known – so readers can understand how themes are the same across many stories. I hope they all make the right points!

I also hope this book will inspire you and countless young people to come up with stories the rest of us have never seen before. Stories that make people laugh, cry, gasp, look around to see who's watching and then lean in to read again.

And, most importantly, stories that make readers want to talk about what they've read and share their feelings with friends.

Good luck!

Introduction

Why create stories?

Stories are like magic or telepathy. They connect a writer to the reader, weaving invisible threads from one mind to another that carry images, ideas, emotions and dreams.

Stories are also how we make sense of the world – we use them to teach and learn, as well as discover the extraordinary in the ordinary. So much of our lives revolves around stories.

Why stories matter

For as long as people have huddled around fires, they've shared tales – of heroes and villains, of love, loss, life lessons and things that go bump in the night. Here's how stories are important:

They connect us

Stories build bridges between hearts and minds, drawing people closer together and helping us to understand one another. They are shared experiences that remind us that, no matter how different we may seem, we have a common humanity.

They teach us

Whether it's a moral lesson or how to solve a problem, stories are full of wisdom. They show us the consequences of actions, inspire bravery, help us see another person's point of view and teach us to navigate the complexities of life.

They spark our imagination

A story can take us anywhere – to distant planets, enchanted forests, secret headquarters, alternative realities or places deep within ourselves we didn't know existed. They open doors to endless possibilities.

Most importantly, everyone has stories worth telling. Yes, that means you. The adventures, dreams and ideas swirling inside you are unique, and have value. They're just waiting for you to share them.

The benefits of creating stories

Building creativity and problem-solving skills

Crafting a plot, creating characters and weaving in conflicts is both a puzzle and an adventure. It helps you push your own creativity, think outside the box and explore new ways of solving challenges (real or imagined!).

Boosting confidence and communication

Writing helps you find your voice. You become better at explaining your ideas. Sharing your story with others allows you to see the impact your words can have, giving you a sense of accomplishment and self-belief.

Encouraging empathy and self-expression

When you write, you step into your character's shoes, experiencing their world. At the same time, you reveal your own perspective, allowing others to see the world through your eyes. You're able to connect with other people in a unique way.

What you'll achieve by the end of this book

Knowing how to get a story started

The process of creating a story will feel manageable, even fun. In **part one** of this book, you'll understand how a few key story elements can kick-start your imagination and make writing exciting, as well as how to break the process down into small, approachable steps.

We're going to cover:

1. **The 'Big Idea' to start with**
2. **The Status Quo and Inciting Incident**
3. **Your Main Character**
4. **The Villain**
5. **The Wise Person or Guide**
6. **Things That Need Fixing**
7. **Rock Bottom and the Triumphant Outcome**

With these elements, you should be able to create a story that will interest and excite not only yourself, but also all the people you want to read it. And along the way, you'll also...

Get valuable tips to help bring your story together

In **part two**, we give you some basic story structures so that you can put all the pieces you've just learned together. And so that you can make it even better, you'll find out ways to make your writing effective, as well as organise your space and time.

Gain tools to stay engaged

We go over ways to keep the magic alive and your brain sparking in **part three**, even when you feel stuck and the writing gets tough. The practical tips you'll find later in this book are there to help you overcome obstacles, create new ideas and stay inspired.

Discover your unique voice

No two people write in the same way. Your voice is unique, and this book will help you embrace that. This book isn't about *how* you write, but about getting inspiration about *what* to write and then how to put it together. As you get further into writing your story, you'll learn to trust your instincts and let your own individual style take over.

AND I'll leave a handy grid at the end of the book with all the important story elements for you to copy and use any time you like. This will make it super-easy for you to bash out quick ideas for a story whenever inspiration strikes.



In a nutshell...

Whether you're here to inspire a classroom, craft a tale for fun or finally put that big idea onto paper or laptop, this book is for you. So, let's unlock your inner storyteller and let the adventure begin!

Part I:

7 Essential Elements You Need To Create An Attention-Grabbing Story

Welcome to the heart of storytelling – this is where you'll get tools and insights to create stories that captivate and inspire whoever reads them.

The following chapters look at the vital elements every successful story needs: big ideas, life-changing moments, engaging characters, mind-blowing twists and worlds you'll want to lose yourself in.

This is the point of no return. By going to the next page, you accept your adventure. Step right in and begin your journey!

I: The 'Big Idea' to Start With

Before you get into the characters and scenarios that will shape your story, you need to know what your story is going to be about. What's the big idea, theme or topic? The spark that will grab your imagination and refuse to let go?

It could be anything. Literally, anything at all that you find exciting, interesting, quirky, weird, cute or just fun. Some examples might be:

- Having a bad memory
- Magic doors that take you anywhere
- Needing money to save your home
- What people secretly want but won't talk about
- Making the world's biggest cheeseburger

- Your friend is an alien in disguise
- Pressure to please friends
- How babies rule the world
- Pets that can talk
- A pink teenage vampire unicorn who battles criminals in your town

The big idea or spark will be something that makes your brain whirr into action and think: “Whoa, what could happen around that?”

Finding that spark might feel daunting, but inspiration is all around you, waiting to be noticed. This chapter will guide you through finding, shaping and setting the stage for your story idea.

Tip: Let a title inspire your tale!

This might sound slightly weird, but coming up with an interesting title before doing anything else can be like finding a magic key. It can unlock your imagination and build a story all by itself.

A striking or unusual title will be a springboard for your mind. It'll spark images, characters and questions. What does it mean? Who's involved? What's the story? Let your brain run wild and guide you to the answers.

Titles can hint at genre, tone or mystery. *The House with*

Chicken Legs immediately suggests something magical, while *They Both Die at the End* is a bold line that grabs attention and raises intrigue. A title that lights up your thoughts could shape everything that follows.

Sometimes, a fun or inspiring title will just pop into your mind – often from a combination of things you’ve been thinking about, or a twist on something you just saw or overheard. Other times, it might come from a writing exercise or experimenting with random word combinations, questions or unusual phrases.

Don’t overthink it – *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* began as a detail in a draft. Your title doesn’t have to be final – it just needs to get you thinking!

If you want more inspiration beyond the title, the next sections are for you...

Finding inspiration

Everyday events, dreams and questions

Inspiration often hides in plain sight. Everyday events – like the last sentences in an overheard conversation, a smile, someone running for a bus (maybe in fancy dress?) or the scenes in a vivid dream – can provide the seeds for a story.

Notice the small details around you – the way sunlight filters through leaves, objects people leave behind or scratches on a car – and ask yourself what could have been

happening around them.

Ask ‘What if?’ to spark creativity

Asking ‘What if?’ can be a powerful tool. What if a rainy day was caused by a lonely cloud seeking friends? What if the old tree in your garden was a portal to another world? What if your grandmother was secretly in charge of MI5? What if your friend was an alien? What if that football was wired to explode thirty minutes into the game? What if that fish knows the secret to life, the universe and everything?

Let curiosity and your imagination lead the way. There are no limits.

Explore themes you care about

Try to identify themes that resonate deeply with you, such as bravery, kindness or wanting to belong. Alternatively, think about the shows, stories and topics you already like – perhaps ghosts, future tech, games, music artists, ancient Egypt, sports contests or dinosaurs could be your thing.

Try combining a theme with something you already like, for example: a brave ghost in a sports team? Future tech in ancient Egypt?

Defining your story idea

What is your story about in one sentence?

Once you've found inspiration, it's a good idea to create a clear, simple concept. Can you summarise what your story is about in one simple sentence? Maybe start with, **"It's about a kid who..."** or, **"It's about a place where..."** and go from there. This sentence can be your guiding star, keeping you on track as you develop the plot.

Who is the story for?

This is a valuable exercise that helps a lot with writing. Think about your audience – will your readers be kids, teens or people who love a specific topic or type of book? What are they like? How would you expect to talk to them?

It's a good idea to visualise just one person you'll be writing for – this will help you shape your tone and style.

Why is this story important to tell?

Finally, consider why this story feels important to you. Perhaps it's a tale you wish you'd read when you were growing up, an issue that you care about or an idea that keeps pulling at your heartstrings. Your personal connection will bring authenticity and passion to your writing (and also keep you motivated to finish!).

Setting the scene

Where and when does your story happen?

With your idea in hand, it's time to build the world where your story will unfold. Decide whether your story's world is modern, historical or imaginary. Is it in this country, or another? Is it in the countryside, a major city, in space or just down the road from your house?

The setting is more than just a backdrop – it shapes the mood and influences the actions of your characters.

What mood or feeling do you want to create?

What will be the general atmosphere in your story? The kind of mood you want to create will influence the setting, the times, the characters and how they behave. A cozy, magical forest feels very different from a bustling, futuristic city. And magic will feel very different in the real world around you than in an ancient castle.

What would make a captivating starting point?

A famous author called Kurt Vonnegut said about starting points for short stories: "Start as close to the end as possible". Choose an intriguing starting point that feels ripe for change.

What's the first image or event that will draw readers in

and make them eager to know more? It's important to get readers interested right from the moment they start the first page.



In a nutshell...

Getting your big idea (and especially a title!) in place, and thinking about the starting moment, is like building the foundations of your story. This sets the stage for the 'status quo' and 'inciting incident', which we'll explore in the next chapter. You're probably also full of ideas for your main character – don't worry, we'll get to them soon!

What are your starting points?

Make a few notes in the grid below, or start on your own piece of paper.

My Big Idea:	
Title?:	
When are where?:	
Mood:	
Opening image idea:	

About the author...



Douglas Caleb loves bringing fantasy into reality, and started writing his first children's book before his own kids were born.

Growing up on a steady diet of Doctor Who, Enid Blyton, Star Trek, Susan Cooper, Tintin, 2000AD and The X Files, he's now on a mission to write books that young readers

(and their parents, because he's had experience with bedtimes) will love to read. Or at least not want to put down.

His 'Our Weird World' series for ages 8-12 features stories where ordinary children are thrust into extraordinary circumstances and somehow find their way through to an interesting ending. 'Jet Pet' for readers aged 7-10 follows the adventures of two cute animals with jetpacks from the future sent back to today to stop an evil salmon from flooding the world and changing time – what's not to like?

Douglas lives with his wife and two sons in Colchester, where life can be as weird as you want it to be. He listens to soundtrack music when he writes (and BBC 6 Music when he doesn't), loves cooking and generally needs more shelves for his ever-expanding collection of books.

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