







Pearson

Inspiring reluctant writers to exceed expectations



School name:	 University Academy Keighley
Region:	 Bradford, West Yorkshire
Area type:	 Town
Number of pupils:	 644

School type:	 Academy (11-18 years)
Ofsted rating:	 Requires improvement (May 2014)
Pupil premium %:	 45.9%
EAL %:	 87.3%

Why Skills for Writing?

Many students were joining University Academy Keighley with attainment well-below average. Many students therefore struggled with grammar and creative thinking. **Farhat Alam, Literacy Coordinator and English teacher** at the school realised they needed a new approach to drive up standards and engage students to develop their writing skills at KS3.

Key points to take away

- **Interesting characters** and genres to **engage** even the **most reluctant writers**.
- **Step by step** approach helps students to **develop their writing skills** without feeling overwhelmed.
- **Focus on core writing** and **linguistic skills** helps motivate students to write independently.
- Resource flexibility **allows teachers to select, and edit, activities** to suit particular classes and/or students.

“The children loved the *Spy* unit and it was a hit from the outset.”

Background

Despite many students making the progress expected of them in English at University Academy Keighley, their skills in writing were lagging behind, meaning that the proportion of students attaining 5 A* to C GCSE grades was below the national average.

Many of the students had low to average writing skills and those with active imaginations still struggled to get their ideas down in an interesting way, even through the use of various language and writing techniques. Many students began at a level 4 or a low 5 for writing.

In September 2013, Farhat Alam, Literacy Coordinator and English teacher volunteered her team to join a pilot to trial a unit of work from *Skills for Writing* called *Spy fiction*. Farhat discusses the impact of *Spy fiction* on the students' writing at the school.

How Farhat used *Spy fiction* in *Skills for Writing*

We used the unit over the autumn term with our Year 8 students and several teachers taught the *Spy fiction* unit of work to different classes. We found that the students were inspired by the variety of texts and tasks which is something we had not seen before. We found that the unit was successful in teaching students about narrative and the way grammar can be used in writing in an engaging way.



The *Spy fiction* unit was easily accessible to learners in the classroom; the lessons introduced skills and tangible tools, one at a time, for them to use effectively in their stories. This approach meant our students could take a step by step approach without feeling overwhelmed.

Implementing Skills for Writing

We taught the unit using front of class digital resources and accompanying worksheets and lesson plans. The number of resources available gave our teachers the flexibility to pick and choose the right level materials to use with their students. **They also gave us fresh ideas and some teachers even found they were teaching aspects of writing they had not covered before such as use of pronouns/proper nouns.**

The scheme of work was beneficial as it showed us how to approach a writing unit in a way that was both interesting and clear to our students. It also helped us to focus the students' skills on different sections of their story and give them the opportunity to bring that together to create a piece of work they could be proud of.

Creating a buzz about writing

The resources gave the students a fantastic model and starting point to assist them in beginning and developing their writing confidently. The highly focused lessons within the unit meant it was much easier, and more beneficial to the students' confidence, to write their stories in pieces. This allowed them to apply specific aspects of fiction writing e.g. verbs and adverbs in action scenes. It was also good for getting students to reflect on the stylistics and quality of their writing.

The lessons covered a wide variety of writing skills and allowed students to build on prior knowledge throughout the unit. Lesson ideas were also creative and could be easily adapted to suit the needs of the class.

Turning reluctant writers into wordsmiths

The students loved this unit and it was a hit from the outset, they were immediately interested in the topic of spies and spy fiction. It's a genre they were familiar with and they enjoyed its action and thriller elements as well as its conventional heroes and

villains. It was great to have various spy fiction stories that were interesting but still age appropriate.

The entire class was fully engaged and so excited to write every day – something we had never experienced before. We even had students saying how they felt more confident and how they were enjoying writing stories. They would go around the room sharing their stories and helping others with ideas. They begged for more lessons to write at the end of the scheme of work and did not want to move on.

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The outcome – everyone's a winner

The written work produced by the students after the trial was excellent; they were writing at levels 6/7. The best thing for us is that the students were interested, motivated and really enjoying writing.

Several of our students, who had been using the *Spy fiction* unit, entered the Airedale Writing competition and we had four winners from one class! Three of them had never won any recognition for their English before and they were exceptionally proud to receive their awards watched by proud parents in the audience. What was even more amazing is that from the 10 students that took part in the competition – eight won writing from the spy fiction genre.



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