Skeletons for Organising Writing

Writing is the hardest thing we ever teach and the most challenging skill children ever learn. To be a fluent writer you need good spoken language skills, good reading skills, the ability to think clearly and organise your thoughts coherently, and ready access to a complex array of written language conventions. Not to mention the physical skills required to manoeuvre a pencil around a page.

**Use skeletons flexibly**

Ask children to represent what they've learned in a visual form, using ‘skeletons’ to show the links and ‘memory joggers’ to stand for the constituent thoughts. Memory joggers can be pictures, diagrams, words, abbreviations … anything that sums up a chunk of meaning and makes it memorable.

Using pictures and diagrams can help children to think clearly and organise their thoughts coherently. By making their thinking visible, children can record what they’ve learned for themselves and share it with other people.

**Turn your memory joggers into sentences**

Skeletons aren’t necessarily a precursor to writing – children can use them just as a way of recording what they’ve learned. But they do make a half-way house between thinking and writing; the content they’re going to write about is all there on the skeleton, and all they have to do now is to turn their memory joggers into written sentences.

Skeletons are infinitely flexible. You just have to furnish children with a repertoire of skeletons: timelines, spidergrams, cycles, hierarchies, trees, fishbones, flowcharts, etc.

Once they’ve got their thoughts into some sort of order, you can demonstrate how to ‘Turn your memory joggers into sentences’ through Shared Writing.

**Use skeletons across the school**

It helps if you use skeletons on a whole-school basis, so that children build up their repertoire of skeletons over time, in response to the sort of learning they’re ready for and their level of literacy skills.

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