

# The Story Builder

Write a bedtime story  
for someone you love...

## What is the Story Builder?

Developed by Stratford Literary Festival and children's author Hollie Hughes (that's me – hello!), the Story Builder will help you create a bedtime story for your child or children in your family. We've run workshops with hundreds of parents in prisons all across the UK to do just that, but the Covid pandemic has meant that we can't be with you face-to-face at the moment. Until we can, this pack will give you the tools you need to get started on your very own bedtime story right now!

## Why write a story for my child?

Because it's one of the most precious gifts you can give a child, and especially so right now. It shows them you're thinking about them, even when you can't be with them. We promise you that, tiny or teen, your child will never forget that you took the time to do this.

## Help! I don't think I can do it!

Don't worry, the Story Builder makes writing a story easy – so easy, in fact, you'll wonder why you ever thought it might be difficult in the first place. If you follow the simple steps we've given you here, we guarantee you a story at the end of it. Our process is simple – it's why we have a 100% success rate on our workshops.



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## Once upon a time...

**Start with a hero or heroine for your story.** Human, animal, magical creature – you choose. Some writers like to put their own child in the story – either as themselves, or as a character that represents them – but this is entirely up to you.

**Like this:** *Once upon a time there was a bear called George.*

**Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...**

rat, cat, elephant, superhero, witch, dragon, unicorn, vampire, fairy, crocodile - or even your own child!



2

## Set the scene...

**Location! Location! Location!** Give us an idea of what this story world is like – real life or fairy tale, magical universe or scary place, past, present or future.

**Like this:** *George lived in an ordinary forest, in an extraordinary place, in the magical land of Animalia.*

**Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...**

woodland, island, outer space, parallel world, desert, city, underwater, jungle, polar, zoo, Ancient Egypt, dreamscape



3

## Go for goal...

**What does your hero or heroine want, and how far are they willing to go to get it?** What will the consequences be if they don't succeed? The higher the stakes, the more interesting the story.

**Like this:** *What George wanted more than anything else in the world was to be an astronaut.*

**Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...**

castle, cake, magical powers, treasure, friend, love, teddy, courage, hot air balloon, lost toy, trophy, pet, job, fun, rain



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## Troublemaker...

### Who or what will stand in their way?

Don't make it too easy for them - without some kind of conflict, problem, or difficulty, you don't really have a story.

**Like this:** *But the only animals allowed at space school were monkeys.*



### Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...

mountain, monster, distance, enemy, fear, time, parents, sea crossing, competition, swamp, mouse, moose, evil spell, snow

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## Work it out...

**How will they overcome their difficulties?** Characters who work hard to solve problems, and take control of their own destiny, are always more interesting than those that don't.

**Like this:** *So, George disguised himself as a monkey, aced space school, and became chief astronaut of the universe.*



### Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...

quest, magic, teamwork, cunning plan, battle, humour, acrobatics, grapplehooks, boat, helping hand, trickery, recycling

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## The End

**How will it all turn out?** Save the cliff hangers for the movies – happily or horribly (or even hoppily!) ever after, your child will want to know.

**Like this:** *After many years (and many, many bananas!), George eventually got so sick of pretending to be a monkey that he told everyone his secret, but it turned out no one really minded that much after all. The End.*



### Stuck for ideas? Help yourself to one of these...

twist in the tale, grand finale, lesson, punchline, bittersweet, scope for a sequel, poem, quote, sunset

## Next Steps...

- **So that's the skeleton of your story** – all you need to do now is put the 'meat on the bones'. Fill it out a bit with some detail and give the story a bit of colour.  
Have fun experimenting with rhyme, puns, humour, repeating patterns etc. Be playful!  
Use all five senses to bring it alive: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. How did the character feel? Scared, happy, sad...?
- **The Story Builder works just as well for tots or teens**  
Keep it age-appropriate by varying what it's about and the length.
- **Keep it simple**  
A well-crafted simple story is better than a muddled complicated one, and young children don't always understand complicated stories.
- **Put your child at the centre**  
Even if they're not in the story, you can still include characters and themes they're interested in, or a favourite toy.
- **Make it interesting**  
The best stories mix interesting characters with exciting plots – get both right, and you can't go wrong.
- **Give your story a title**, and a dedication.

**Remember, we are all storytellers at heart – you can do this!**



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## What happens now?

We are able to professionally design a certain number of stories, with pictures, and send two copies back to you. Please ask the Librarian if we can do this. If so, write your story out neatly and put your name and prison number at the top. Please make sure all children's names in the story are clearly spelt out so we get them right, and it would be helpful to know their ethnicity so we get any illustrations right.

If your Library offers Storybook Dads or Mums recording, then you can read your story and it will be recorded and sent to your child.

or you can simply write it out, even draw a few pictures if you feel like it, and give it to your child at your next visit.



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