



Margaret Bateson-Hill's Top Ten Tips for Helping Children Write

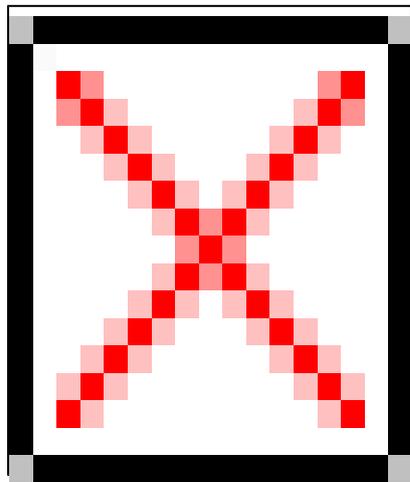
Article Author:

[Margaret Bateson-Hill](#) [1]

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Byline:

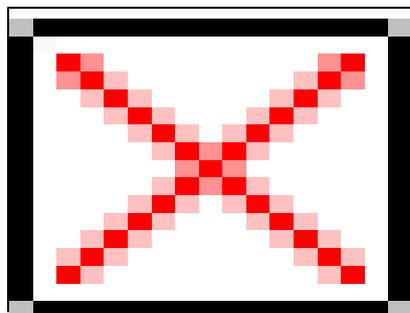
Story-teller and author Margaret Bateson-Hill with advice on how to encourage children's creative writing.



Margaret Bateson-Hill is the author of seven picture books, including **Masha and the Firebird** winner of the **English 4 -11 Award**, and the **Dragon Racer** trilogy. She also works as a storyteller in schools, libraries and museums including the **Victoria and Albert**, the **British Museum**, the **Foundling Museum** and is one of the team of storytellers for the **Horniman Museum**.

Together with fellow author Beverly Birch and members of [CWISL \(Children's Writers and Illustrators in South London\)](#) [3], Margaret runs creative writing festivals for children. Here are her top tips on helping children to write.

Children have fantastic imaginations when it comes to making up stories. I should know, I have been running creative writing sessions for children for years in schools, libraries and after school clubs. So what have I learnt in all that time that I can pass on as tips to help you encourage children with their writing?



Tip number 1: Feed them ? by reading them anything and everything ? fact and fiction, picture books, comics, poetry, song lyrics, new books and old favourites. Read to them everyday. Give them plenty of opportunity to talk ? about the story, about their own experiences. Afterwards make the book available for children to look at or read for themselves.

Tip number 2: Have a thought shower. I spend a lot of time just talking with children about ideas for stories, hearing

their ideas, and sharing suggestions on how a story may want to develop. Make up group stories; get them to draw their stories and then tell you what's happening.

Tip number 3: Let children write about something they feel passionate about ? something they love or hate. Then they'll have plenty to say. A story should have a sense of purpose, whether it is a message to change the world or a story that makes you fall over laughing, or hide behind the sofa in terror.

Tip number 4. Help children plan their stories all the way to the end. I find most children's stories start brilliantly and then dribble to a stop. Make sure they know how the their story will end. Will the hero be victorious or will everyone die in agony?

One way to help children plan is to ask them to tell their story in eight (approx) sentences. Just the plot ? no trimmings. Here is Little Red Riding Hood broken down.

Little Red Riding Hood takes a basket of food to her grandma

She meets a wolf

The wolf runs ahead to the grandma's house

The wolf eats grandma

The wolf pretends to be grandma

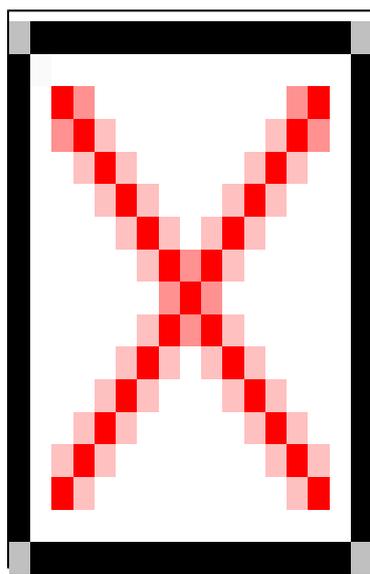
Red Riding Hood arrives at grandma's

The wolf tries to eat Red riding Hood

A wood cutter arrives just in time to save Red Riding Hood and rescue grandma

All that's needed now are the details.

Storyboards are also very helpful. Fold A4 in half, then into quarters. Now you have four rectangles on the front and four on the back. The child can draw each main scene in their story.



When I was planning the books in my **Dragon Racer** series, I planned each book with chapter headings.

Tip number 5: Get to know the details. I like to make fact files of everything I need to know about my characters. What they look like, age, favourite food, likes and hates and whether they are happy, sad or angry. I know who their family are, where they live and most importantly, who their friends and enemies are.

Often I make a map of important places in the story, and where they are in relation to each other. In **The Silver Flame**, when I wanted Joanna to explore the air vents of the dragon caves I ended up drawing a map to work out which turnings she needed to take to reach Vincent's study.

If the child doesn't know how to move the action on, or what a character is like, I ask the child to imagine they are in a film of their story. I ask them what they can see, hear, smell. How they would feel if they were their character. A child once told me all her character could see were her own blue shoes as she was too frightened to look up ? perfect!

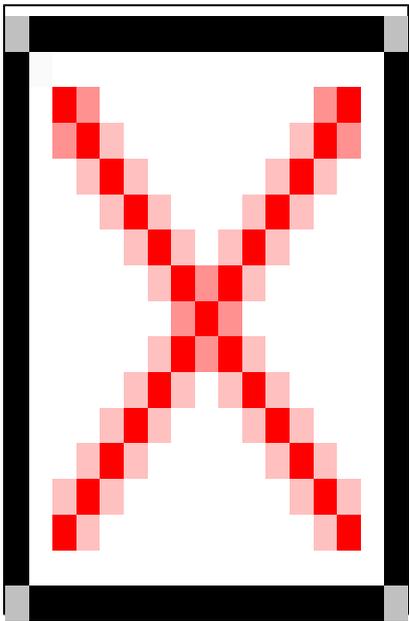
Tip number 6: If something is unclear just ask the child to explain what they meant. They often have all sorts of wonderful ideas they are trying to convey but don't know how.

Tip number 7: Encourage them to make changes, cross bits out, write bits over the top, and use asterisks. Authors very rarely get it right first time.

Tip number 8: Don't worry too much about spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Of course they are important, but often a child worries more about the punctuation rather than concentrating their efforts on creating their story. I would prefer an amazing story, barely legible and with no punctuation to a bland boring one, neatly written and perfectly punctuated. Punctuation and spellings can be sorted later. I often scribe for children who find the mechanics of writing difficult. Once somebody is writing for them, children can't get the words out fast enough.

Tip number 9: When the story is finished, get the child to read it OUT LOUD! It's amazing how many times children say, "Oh I just need to?"

Tip number 10: Give encouragement! Lots of it.



The Dragon Racer books are published by Catnip Publishing at £6.99

Dragon Racer Legacy of Fire 978-1846471216

Dragon Racer First Flight 978-1846471650

Dragon Racer The Silver Flame 978-1846471742

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