



NEW WRITING  
NORTH  
YOUNG WRITERS



## Writing for Children's Theatre

### Warm Up:

Daft Dictionary

Pick two words at random from a book or a piece of text. Mash the two words together and then spend three minutes writing a dictionary definition of this new phrase, e.g. a Paradise Dog, a Hair Vacuum. Be as silly or as sensible as you like.

### Get Inspired:

Research children's literature or TV

To begin thinking about writing a children's story, research is one of the best things you can do. Watch five minutes of a children's show (old or recent) and read a whole picture book or chapter of a children's novel. Think about the following questions:

- What age is this aimed at? How do you know?
- Is there a simple life lesson or moral sewn throughout the story that comes to light for the character at the end? How has the story successfully and simply portrayed this?
- How many characters are used? Why do you think this is?
- Take note of the language that is used from both younger, older and non-human characters – what is their style of speech? How long do they speak for? What is the purpose of what they are saying?
- How long is the story? This often relates to the attention span of the target audience's age.

My favourite books and TV shows that you can source online (for ages 3–8):

- Winnie the Pooh books and series (to highlight playful language)
- Roald Dahl – *The Witches* (to encourage your weirdness and wackiness... proof you don't have to be afraid to be a little bit scary when writing for children either!)
- *Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood* (for understanding how to use life lessons in stories)
- Dr Seuss – *Oh The Places You'll Go* (a good model for using rhyme)

## Give it a Try:

### Protagonist Creation

I usually begin my script ideas by bulking out my main character (I often do this before I plot their journey or the actual storyline). Remember that children need to relate to the main character of the play. Therefore, I tend to write my protagonist as a child/animal/creature of the age the play will be suitable for.

To do this you have to get inside the mind of a child. It depends what age you are writing for, but a child's world is relatively small in comparison to an adult's. Think about a child you know, or yourself as a child, and brainstorm the answers to the questions below.

- What is their greatest wish?
- What is their greatest fear? (These two questions can often help spark the idea for your storyline and characters journey)
- Who is the most important person to them? (A child often needs someone to make them feel safe/words of wisdom in a story – this also helps the audience feel safe too).
- What is their strongest emotion? (This can help you when developing their personality traits, but will also help you to think about this emotion being something that can help or hinder them in their journey – or both!)
- What do they struggle with the most?
- How does this affect them? Does this relate to their greatest wish or fear?
- What is their favourite game to play? Thing to eat? Tune to hum? Animal? What do they look like? Sound like? Smell like? How old are they?

Can you write a diary entry for a day in the life of this character? Think about their age – if they would be too young to write, maybe it is an internal monologue of how they spend their day and what their thought patterns are?

Can you brainstorm a potential story idea for this character? Spend 10 minutes doing this and let your pen flow freely – you know your character quite well by this point, so let your imagination go wild!

## Challenge Yourself:

Read the attached script, *Orville*. This play toured libraries and was aimed at 3–6 year olds. As you can see, it only includes one actor and two characters (one of whom was a puppet). Can you create another character that would work well in this script, and write a scene with them in? Who are they and why are they important to Orville's journey?

MY TOP TIP: Don't be afraid to be silly, wacky and nonsensical. The BEST thing to do is listen to a child play, have a conversation with a child, or read a story a child has written. You will learn so much about how their imagination, mind, problem-solving skills, worries and thoughts work – this in turn will most likely give you ideas for characters and plots, and understand what children want to read, see and hear! They really are the most creative people on earth!

This workshop was devised by Danielle Burn for New Writing North Young Writers.



I am a children's playwright, theatre maker and facilitator living and working in the North East. I am also a new mother to my little girl, Iris, a lover of coffee, yoga and the seaside. My passion lies within the wonderful world of children's theatre and this is where I have been extending and expanding my practice since leaving Northumbria University almost 10 years ago. Over these years I have built up a portfolio of work with local communities and young people for organisations such as Northern Stage, New Writing North, Live Theatre, Bait (creative people and places) to name a few.

My first play, MELVA is currently touring schools and local venues after successful run of sold-out public performances over Christmas 2017 ,the production is now a creative tool to support children (and the adults who support them) to understand more about worries and anxieties and learn tools for self-care. This supports the mandate set out in the 2017 Green Paper Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision. Melva has teamed up with Children North East and Public Health and is produced by Mortal fools I am currently working with The Customs House South Shields and The Word, as part of winning their script submission competition for WRITE FESTIVAL in 2019 to produce a show around Mental Health for a younger audience, 3-6 year olds, called Peggy Pearpot about the world's inside of a little girls tear drops.

New Writing North Young Writers is a programme for young people aged 12-19. We run creative writing groups, masterclasses and programmes in schools across the North East. We support young people to express their ideas, to work with professional writers and artists, to create and share new work, and to meet other young writers.

We would love to read your writing! Share it with us on social media using #writingfromhome or by emailing [youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com](mailto:youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com). Search for New Writing North Young Writers on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, where we will also be sharing regular writing prompts. Each week we will select a Young Writer of the Week whose work will be shared on our channels.

Find other writing workshops and much more on our website [www.newwritingnorth.com](http://www.newwritingnorth.com)

**NEW WRITING  
NORTH**



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## Orville

*Edwin, the owl specialist is flustered and frustrated. He is about to do a presentation on owls in chestnut forest, but has lost the star of the show, his baby owl Orville. His audience are arriving.*

*Edwin tries to cover up that things are going wrong.*

**Edwin:** Welcome one and all, I , erm, please sit, get cosy, cosy is good! *(looking around)* Oh bother, I mean, oh splendid! On behalf of the Chestnut Forest *(points to sign)* Owl appreciation society I would like to welcome you to today's special talk. I'm Edwin, your feathery fanatic! I love owls! Love love love! And of course you do too? And today you are here to see, a real life owl! Yes you are. And you will! Yes indeed! But for now...A picture of an owl! See...feathers, feet, eyes. I drew this myself. And next up *(looking around for something else to show)*...a real life owl feather! *(waiting for a round of applause)*. Owls are feathery...yes you've said that already Edwin. They are also...cuddly! I love cuddling owls. Owl cuddles are scrumptious and feathery and, I said feathery again, oh bother. Do any of you know anything about owls? *(react to their facts)* My owl facts have fallen out of my head, I'm all higgledy piggledy. Oh bother, I'm so sorry, you have travelled all this way to see my owl, Orville, and I have lost him! You may as well go back home and...

*A knock is heard*

**Edwin:** Are you coming out to say hello? *(Muttering to Orville)* I know you're shy. And scared. They seem nice. I swear! Promise! Feathery promise! Keep your eyes closed and then slowly open them when I count to 3?

*A bit of struggle is seen as Edwin tries to get Orville out of his trunk*

1,2,3....

*Orville opens his eyes then closes them again, tries to hide behind Edwin*

I sincerely apologise *(to audience)*

*Orville begins to yawn and sleep*

**Edwin:** Goodness gracious. Orville, its midnight, you can't fall asleep. All of the Owls in chestnut forest will be waking up soon. And you have a very important thing to do this week...learn to fly

*Orville shudders and shakes his head furiously and whispers to Edwin*

Important things are scary? You're going to sleep instead? Hmmm

*Orville begins to nod off, soft night time music begins, Narrator gives a sigh as if he tries every day to get Orville out of his tree. An owls hoot is heard.*

**Narrator:** An owls hoot is quite a treat. Night time is when owls meet. Whit woo whit woo to you, and you and you. Listen closely and you will hear the owls of chestnut forest cheer. Whit woo whit woo to you, and you and you!

How many owls are in Chestnut forest? Let's count together.

*Every time a whit woo is heard narrator counts with the children (up to 5)*

**Edwin:** But there are 6 owls in chestnut forest, and we only heard five whit woo's? Hmm. Wait a second, Orville didn't whit woo? Did anyone hear Orville whit woo?

As you can see, Orville is a little out of sorts. I just can't seem to help him. *(thinking)* I have an idea! Maybe YOU can help him? But first we need to wake him up...gently and slowly, can you all 'whit whoo' with me?

*Audience make whit woo noises to encourage Orville to come out of his tree they start off quietly then Paul realises that Orville isn't waking up, they get louder and louder. Orville shoots out of the tree with an almighty fright*

You look a bit down in the dumps. Maybe our foresty friends can help you with your hoots and you can tell us what's wrong? Hooting always makes me feel better. We can sing

*Orville sheepishly nods to agree*

Let's all say hoot hoot hoot together!

*Music starts Hoot hoot hoot is encouraged throughout song*

Hoot Hoot Hoot

It's an owls job to watch

And hoot

And be wise

With big bright eyes

Hoot hoot hoot

Its and owls job to soar

And glide

With pride

In the darkest skies

Hoot hoot hoot

But this owl

This one right here

Is full to the brim with fear

And worry

And fuzzy, squirmy thoughts

Hoot Hoot Hoot

He's not wise, and his eyes?

Are always squeezed shut

He doesn't soar

He'd probably fall to the floor

With a thud

He's not strong

He's scared

And worried

Of it all

The dark

The light

They both give him a fright

What a feeble owl he feels indeed

Hoot hoot hoot

*Orville goes back to his tree trunk*

What a pickle, an owl who is afraid of the light and the dark?! I think Orville needs some help to see just how beautiful day and night can really be. But for now, it's bedtime across Chestnut Forest. Best to start *this* journey with a fresh mind. Goodnight Moon, Goodnight stars, Good night bugs and critters in the mud, Good night fuzzy squirrels, Good night Orville.

*Night time music plays, Orville and Paul close eyes night time music plays- cockerel crows*

*Paul wakes with excitement*

Fresh as a daisy, fresh as a lemon! Morning is my favourite time of day!

*Says good morning to the audience, ask how they slept*

Lets see how orville slept, I think he is pretending to be asleep still...

*All shout wake up Orville*

**Narrator:** But it is a sparkling new day, there is nothing more wonderful, come out and play!

**Orville:** Zzzzz Zzzzz

**Narrator:** Your friends say Hi! You say bye?!

Orville is awfully grumpy in the morning

*Orville opens his eyes and stamps his feet furiously, making a grumbling noise!*

Shall we go on an adventure today? Not all adventures are far away. we can have one right here at the bottom of your tree

But...you're sc, sca Scared?

*Orville nods feeling ashamed*

Everyone gets scared! Every worm, every mouse, every giant hippo, every woodlouse

*Listens to Orville*

But you are the MOST scared...and haven't used your wings before My oh my, an owl who can't fly?! Shall we try?

*Orville moves his wings slowly, he lifts off the ground a tiny bit and then crashes to the floor.*

There must be something weighing you down...?

Orville has a little think, he ruffles his feathers, and gives a tight blink. He thinks of all of the things in the day that scare him in each and every way. Like bugs that don't give hugs, the sun that looks hot not fun, people everywhere whizzing by without a care that could knock him and prod him, oh deary me, the daytime for Orville is as scary as can be!

Lets take a few steps together into the day, what do you say?

*They take a deep breath and the audience count to 5 with each step Orville and Paul take. Orville reaches the audience and screeches, leaping back with fright*

Not all people are scary, Orville. All you have to do is give a little smile and say 'how do you do', and because you are with someone who knows you, you are safe and sound

*Orville and Paul make their way through some people in the audience saying 'how do you do', Orville enjoys it more and more.*

*Deep breath*

That was joyful- Do you feel light and floaty? Shall we try your wings again?

*Orville tries to fly, he gets a bit higher than last time, excitement builds, then all of a sudden he crashes to floor again*

*(to audience)* Oh dear, Orville mustn't feel fully brave yet? What else do you think he could be scared of in the daytime? What things are you scared of?

*Take examples from audience*

See Orville, you are not alone, everyone has things they are afraid of.

Even me, lets see... hairy spiders that spin, sharks with jagged fins, falling over and stubbing my toe, getting pecked by a vicious crow, being a human is scary

Being an owl is too? But please don't stew, just twit twoo, theres never a problem that can't be fixed, there's plenty of solutions, so take your pick...

So what do you do when you're scared?

Hmmm...well i...stop and think! I stop and think of Happy little thoughts, fluffy little thoughts, funny little thoughts that make me chuckle. You'll know it's a happy little thought because you will feel light and won't be able to control your feet.

*Orville closes his eyes, all of a sudden his feet start to tap and hop, giggles and whispers to Edwin.*

You were thinking of my new friends and your feet started to hop and tap!

See how a happy thought can get rid of a scary thought?

Orville gave a yawn and a groan, a very tired little owl he was. What a busy day in chestnut forest. Goodnight everyone (repeat bit before)

*The moon appears again, movement as Paul shows Orville going to sleep. Night time sounds appear- wolves, crickets, wind. Orville jumps up and pops his head out of his tree.*

**Orville:**

Help, help!!!

Hoot Hoot Hoot

I'm alone at night

Something might bite

Hoot hoot hoot

I wont open my eyes in case there's a surprise

a giant worm under my bed

Or a star falls on my head

And hurts me so much that I cry

I wish I could fly

Hoot hoot hoot

Sounds in the dark

They scare my ears

Like wind that whistles

So loud

I have so many fears

Dogs that bark

I hate the dark!

Hoot hoot hoot!

**Narrator:** Orville! Are you okay? Oh no, the dark was scaring you again wasn't it. There's things we can do. Things to help. Yes there are! Lots of things!

Like listening, with your ears! What scary things can you hear? The dogs are grumping?! Listen harder! they're not? they're...singing! And singing isn't scary at all, you love singing!

*Orville moves around listening for more sounds*

WIND?! Wind is the scariest of all!

Listen harder

*Orville starts to giggle*

The wind is...laughing?! Laughing isn't scary at all! You love laughing! That's right Orville, these things that you are scared of, you have been making them up

Sometimes our brains like to make up silly stories, but if we listen, and look and think harder, we realise there is nothing to be afraid of! Do you have any more worries about the dark?

*Orville nods and points to the stars*

The stars?

But they're so far

that one there?

where?

Its not falling!

Its just waiting for morning

It's wont hit your head, you don't need to go back to bed

Look look look!

it just shook!

Or twinkled shall I say

twinkled? What's a twinkle?

A twinkle *looks* like a shake or a fall, but it's the most special of all. A twinkle is a star saying hello

*Orville looks closer, plucks up the courage and suddenly waves*

Orville soon realised he had been making scary things up in his head, whilst lying in bed, little stories to make him fear and tear up, makings things up, is very silly indeed.

Is there anything else you would like to talk about? Talking is the most magical. Words can solve so many problems

Give it a try, take a deep breath and let your beak wiggle until all your worries come tumbling out

*Orville does as he is told*

**Orville:** It's not just the dark, or the light...it's something else that gives me a fright. My first night of flight! I have to leave my tree and my owl family, to go somewhere ALONE, up in the sky! What happens if my wings fail, or I hurt my tail, my tummy feels all torn! A full night away?! I'd rather stay, in my safe and warm tree, just with me...and my family

*Edwin looks amazed that Orville is using his words to communicate*

**Edwin:** Orville, can't you see how much you have overcome already! You made friends! You stepped 5 steps from your tree, you waved at a star, you really have come so far. I think, with the help of your new friends and your new found courage, you are now brave enough to fly. In fact, I think you always were.

*Orville nods. Edwin asks boys and girls to close their eyes, take a deep breath*

**Narrator:** So off into the night Orville flew, his feathery bravery grew and grew. Over hills, under stars, he swore he flew as far as mars! Once morning came Orville yawned, 'flying is super tiring' he groaned... Orville was proud of all he had done, being brave really was fun! But for now it's bedtime in chestnut forest...etc etc

Movement/music to show night time?