

# A Blog From Gaynor Andrews

## **Where did the inspiration for Pandora and the Story Forge come from?**

I'm never too sure where story ideas come from. A handful of words seem to appear from nowhere – often rhyming – then I'm off and I see where they take me. 'Pandora, adorer ...' dropped in one morning and, before I had a chance to think about it, 'of beautiful words' followed. There were all sorts of things Pandora could have loved, from snowflakes to unicorns to chocolate sprinkles, but she arrived as a word collector – and pretty soon, she was away on a word hunt.

Off she went, sweeping her net high to catch the bird-words, wading out, skirts held high, to hunt for fish-words and dropping to her knees, to scabble for the hedge-words. Every writer is a word-collector so the next step for Pandora, the wordsmith, was to head to the story forge and start hammering out her stories.

## **Which is your favourite illustration from the book?**

Marie-Alice Harel has done an incredible job with the illustrations, with secret little treasures hiding in the borders. There is something new to discover each time a page is pored over. I love the jewel-coloured jars, with the word-seeds silently growing and glowing but I think my favourite image is the one at the very end. The child, who was busily reading on the cover of the book, now sits writing her own stories – perched high above the castle and dragons of her imagination.



### **Stories create story-tellers**

As a primary teacher, reading a book together was a highlight of the day, and the remarkable thing about all this exposure to books is that the vocabulary and language structures are internalised and become tools for children to use in creating their own stories.

When my daughter was very small, she picked up a book and began 'reading' the story aloud. She was making it up as she went along, of course, but somehow, night after night of listening to stories, had turned my three-year old into a storyteller.

So I knew that Pandora's stories, once read, would magically unravel, ready to be gathered up again by a new generation of storytellers.

*'Then the strangest thing happens. The magic unfurls.*

*A story, once read, shakes itself and uncurls.'*

## How can we encourage children to become story-makers?

I read voraciously as a child: the Chalet School books by Elinor Brent-Dyer, Enid Blyton, Malcolm Saville's Lone Pine books – everything I could get my hands on. I read every series out of order – depending on when they were available to borrow from the local library!

Children who read for pleasure often become writers for pleasure. The [National Literacy Trust's 2023 research report on children and young people's writing](#) pointed to 'alarmingly low levels of writing enjoyment for children and young people'. So, to create story-makers, we want, first of all, for children to love stories: magical, creepy, adventurous, funny – whatever it takes to hook a reader. Before children are ever able to pick up a book and read for themselves, they can be immersed in stories, either through oral storytelling or listening to a book being read aloud.

I hope Pandora and the Story Forge inspires children to tell their own stories. Encourage them to delve into the illustrations. Can they find the dragons? The ship wrestling with the sea monster? The rabbits presenting gifts to the unicorn? Can they make up stories about these images?

Children could choose some of Pandora's 'words', floating on ribbons through the book, and try telling a story using one or more of the words. They could start collecting their own 'special' words and keep them in a box or a jar, ready to be used in their next story.

Try making your own story cubes using ordinary dice. Link each number with a setting, a character and a challenge. For example:

- 1 – under the sea, a dragon, break a spell;
- 2 – the glittering forest, a prince, find a magic item;
- 3 – the forgotten castle, a witch, rescue another character; etc.

Roll the dice once for the setting, a second time for the character and a third time for the challenge. Then encourage children to tell their own story, weaving in some magical words as you go along. Happy story-forging!