Archibald and the Dragon: Teachers' notes

Cunning Kennings

Kennings are a type of figurative language, widely used in Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature to give graphic emphasis to characters, animals and objects. They refer to things, or beings, in terms of what they do or how they are used, e.g. the sea becomes a 'whale-road', the wind turns into 'tree-breaker'. Some Anglo-Saxon *kennings* have found their way into modern language, for instance we still use 'bookworm' to refer to avid readers!

Saxon weapons were often given striking *kennings* as names to add to their fearsome reputation, e.g. bone-breaker and skull-cleaver as used in the Archibald story. The dragon in the story is also described through a series of kennings, which collectively make a poetic riddle: Century-sleeper, Fire-breather, Death-dealer…

Ask your pupils to choose a familiar animal or mythical creature, and then create a short list of descriptive *kennings* for others to listen to and guess the identity. It sometimes helps to think about how the creature behaves as well as how it looks. Can you get what animal this is? Hedge-hopper, moon-dancer, grass-biter, long-eared-listener... [A hare]

A Little Alliteration

Alliteration gives poetry a pulse. It provides rhythm and pace in Old English epic poems, such as *Gawain and the Green Knight*, which were intended to be spoken out loud. Alliteration is also liberally sprinkled throughout the *Archibald* story, used as a framework to weave words together, for example: *The singing sound stretched far across fields and farms.*

Alliteration works particularly well with describing settings and scenes, such as rushing rivers and sizzling steam, and help make the story/poem more multi-sensory. Arrange for your class to go outside, if possible, and describe what they can sense around them as a written list of alliterating sentences. For example: green grass growing in the playground, tree branches bursting with birdsong, the smell of sap rising in the sunshine...

What's Your Problem?

In writing an adventure story, or magical tale, it's sometimes helpful to start with a problem! In Archibald, the main obstacle is dealing with a seemingly invincible dragon that has already conquered an army and thwarted a series of warriors. Archibald himself is the unlikely hero - a 'low status' character, neither big and strong nor well-armoured. However, against the odds he comes up with a cunning method to solve the problem - being swallowed by the dragon and killing it from the inside out.

Ask your pupils to devise their own story-problems: the bigger the better! It could be a monster, a trap; a disaster, even the imminent end of the world - let them go wild with their 'dreadful' imaginations... Then they can devise their own character to problem-solve his or her way out of the situation. Building tension into the story can be achieved by several failed attempts before eventual success; in folktales, three is a magic number.

Making a Name for Yourself
The name of the king in the *Archibald* story is 'Goldwin', which tells something about his high-profile status, whilst also trying to sound believable as a Saxon monarch. Archibald, on the other hand, sounds rather humble and child-like, but has a hidden meaning - it is Anglo-Saxon for 'truly brave'. Similarly, in many English folktales 'Jack' is the main character: a little name with a big tale to tell! Think of some character names from famous fairy tales that might have 'tell-tale names', e.g. Goldilocks, Rumpelstiltskin, Cinderella. Ask your pupils to think of their own character names that both sound imaginative and also define them in some way.

In stories, monsters and beasts often have names that sound menacing, even if we don't know what they mean, e.g. Grendel in *Beowulf*. Ask your class to come up with their own monster names, making use of onomatopoeia so they sound as bad as they are! You could also use a simple formula to create magical, mythical names. For example, the name of a woodland ogre could be part of a tree plus part of the human body/clothing fused together: *Twig-foot, Bark-bottom, Mossy-Boots...* The bare bones of a good name will often provide a starting point for fleshing out the character's attributes and personality within the story.

(Un)happily Ever After…
Instinctively, we all want to know what happens at the end of a story - it's like a mental itch that needs scratching! Try reading or telling your class the first part of a story that they haven't heard before. Stop at a tense part in the narrative and then ask the children to come up with their own endings. For instance, in a Grimm's fairy-tale called 'Iron John', people keep disappearing in a dark forest near the king's palace, until eventually a brave hunter goes in the woods and comes back again. At which point I ask listeners to write/draw/talk about what they imagine the hunter saw…

Make sure your story reaches a satisfying conclusion by addressing its original 'goal'; such as rescuing a prisoner, finding treasure or defeating a villain. Also think about a suitable ending for each of character, whether it's happy or horrible! Try to steer away from obvious or used-before endings. In the *Archibald* story the dragon is killed, but in his death grabs the gold to himself as he slowly turns into a green, grassy hill. Children are naturally very good, and enthusiastic, at finding ways for villainous characters to meet a grisly end!

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