

STORY STARTERS

— TEACHER SUPPORT MATERIAL —



“As a first step to improve boys’ achievement we need to ensure that they are engaged in, and excited by, their learning.”

Boys’ Achievement: A Synthesis of the Data on Education Counts
New Zealand Ministry of Education, December 2007

OVERVIEW

Story Starters is a video resource aimed at engaging boys and inspiring them to write. It has been developed for boys in years 5 to 8, using boys of that age to help create the material. Its main purpose is to kick-start boys’ engagement with writing and be part of a range of tools teachers use to reduce the number of boys who are disengaged or not achieving to their potential in writing.

Story Starters contain three types of videos:

Role model videos

Well-known New Zealand male role models talking about writing and sharing the opening of an exciting story.

“What happens next?” animated videos

The role models’ opening sentences developed by groups of boys and turned into animated videos that end with “What happens next?”

Complete Story animated videos

The complete animated stories from the role models and boys.

The opening sentences from the role models were taken to schools in Wellington, with groups of boys in years 5 to 8 developing them into stories. The boys provided a huge range of creative, descriptive, inventive and funny ideas, which a script-writer took and crafted into eight stories. These stories were developed into fast-paced, modern and entertaining animated videos.

The stories contain a wide range of characters, locations, and problems to be solved and involve topics, themes and ideas that New Zealand boys in years 5 to 8 will enjoy, find interesting and engage with. The stories have been developed with the purpose of entertaining an audience. It is important boys write for a range of different purposes.

STORY STARTER DESCRIPTIONS

There are twelve Role model videos, eight “What happens next?” animated videos, and eight Complete Story animated videos.

1. ROLE MODEL VIDEOS



Filmed in the role model’s workplace or home environment, these short videos give students a sense of who these men are and what they do. The role models talk about how they use writing in their careers, before discussing their favourite stories and their experience of writing when they were young. Each video closes with the role model reading the opening sentences of a story they think would appeal to boys.

Each role model video is 1-2 minutes long.

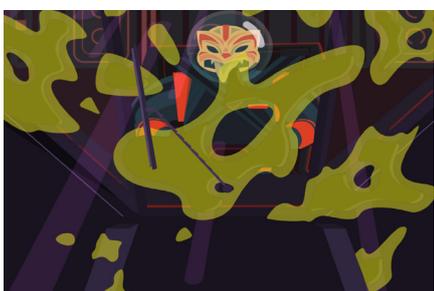
2. “WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?” ANIMATED VIDEOS



These animated videos open with the role model’s opening sentences appearing as words on the screen, which slowly transform into pictures as the story begins. Shortly after, the video ends with the words “What happens next?”

Each “What happens next?” animated video is 1-2 minutes long.

3. COMPLETE STORY ANIMATED VIDEOS



These are the complete stories, beginning to end, developed from the ideas of 8 to 12 year old boys. The animations have their narration and dialogue voiced by professional actors, who bring life and energy to the characters and give a sense of drama and anticipation to the story telling process. Sound effects have also been added to provide further dynamism and spark to the locations and action in each story.

Each complete story is 2-3 minutes long.

THE EIGHT STORY STARTERS

1. BIG VS BIGGER

An oversized kid must overcome the odds to defeat an even bigger bully.



Story starter by **Bret McKenzie**, comedian and musician:

“Sean was the biggest kid on the street. I’m talking huge, as big as a bus. He actually lifted a bus once with his bare hands. Sam ruled the neighbourhood. He was kind of a big deal. That was until big Steve, an even bigger kid, moved in next door.”



2. TRY TACKLING A PTERODACTYL

A pterodactyl wants to play rugby. Can he learn the rules before the big game?



Story starter by **Rodney Cook**, stuntman:

“A giant zombie pterodactyl has taken a liking to roost on the rugby goal posts on the eve of the biggest match of the season. It’s up to team captain Rangī and his prop forwards to get rid of the giant beast.”



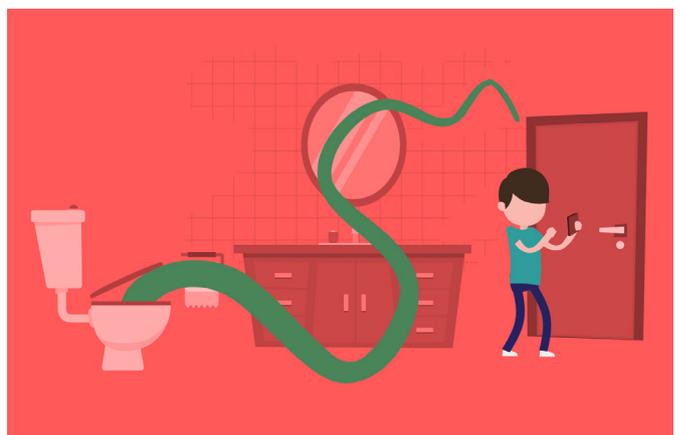
3. THAT REALLY STINKS!

Sam must battle a stinky toilet monster to get his sister’s smartphone back.



Story starter by **Johnson Raela**, TV and radio host:

“Sam’s sister wasn’t going to believe that a huge toilet monster with three blood sucking tentacles took her smartphone. So Sam bravely went under the house and into the stinky sewerage pipe jungle.”



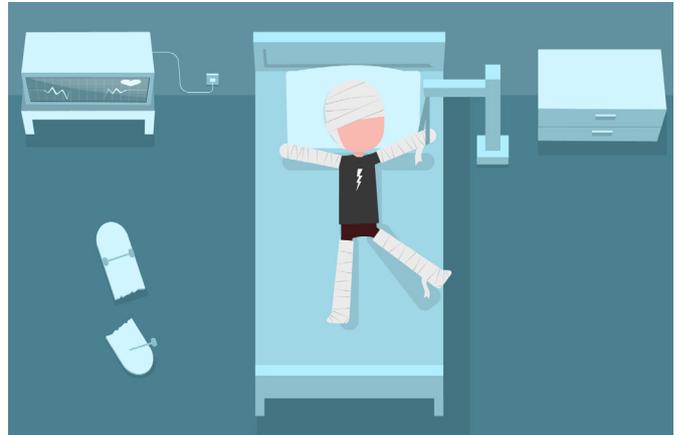
4. THE GREAT SKATEBOARD MYSTERY

Hospitalised, Nico must piece together his day to find out what happened to him and his skateboard.



Story starter by
Levi Hawken,
skateboard legend:

“Nico wakes up in hospital, both legs and both arms in plaster, his skateboard broken in two, and he doesn’t know why... the only thing he can remember is walking up a massive hill with his skateboard and his dog.”



5. CAPTAIN TANIWHA AND THE STICKY SPACE SNOT

Captain Taniwha must avoid crashing into Earth in his snot-covered space ship.



Story starter by
Greg Broadmore,
Weta Workshop artist:

“With a squelching slimy splat, green blobs of interplanetary space-snot smothered the cockpit of Captain Taniwha’s rocket ship. He was blinded, and even worse, on a high speed collision course with Earth...”



6. RUNAWAY ROBOT RAMPAGE

Hemi learns that there are problems with letting a robot do your household chores.



Story starter by
Dai Henwood,
comedian:

“Every weekend there was one job Hemi hated doing: mowing the lawns. He’d much rather be building his latest robot invention in the shed. That was it! What if Hemi could build a robot to mow the lawns?”



7. BEST FIRST DAY EVER

On his first day of school William uses his superpowers to create a good impression.



Story starter by
Brian Falkner,
children's author:

"Everybody stood frozen in shock. Some gasped, others squealed; a teacher fainted. William flipped up the secret panel on the arm of his wheelchair and yelled. "Out of my way, I'm coming through!"



8. HOOKED ON DANGER

One day out fishing, Pua accidentally pulls up something quite unexpected!



Story starter by
Cohen Holloway,
actor:

"Pua cast his line from the dinghy and it snagged straight away. Uncle tried to help him reel it in but it wouldn't budge. Suddenly the skies turned grey, the sea got choppy and a pirate ship bubbled up from the depths of the ocean, dwarfing uncle's dinghy."



THE FOUR ADDITIONAL ROLE MODELS:



Story starter by
Nua Finau,
TV presenter:

“Nobody saw the secret camera flying above Hemi and his dad in their backyard, they were too busy banging away, when all of a sudden, “brrr, bee, whrrr, ffizzzzz, boom, ka ba boom boom ka” Hemi and his dad couldn’t believe it “You can’t tell anyone about this, okay” Hemi nodded as the secret camera flew away....!”



Story starter by
John Schwalger,
Hurricanes’
rugby player:

“A tribe of smelly earthwormy monsters want to include the rugby field in their territory, but the field they want belongs to the #1 team in the WORLD and it’s been theirs for over 125 years. But the team needs to train on it for good luck before the biggest match of their careers.... plus it’s tradition! So the mighty CAPTAIN challenges the smelly earthwormy monsters king to a one on one duel for supremacy and also putting all land and territory up for grabs in a “winner takes ALL”.



Story starter by
Mike McRoberts,
TV journalist:

“This time there’d be no denying it. Sam was going to prove a monster was lurking in their toilet. But as he waited with his sister’s smartphone he felt so sleepy, he could feel himself drifting off...that was until the tentacle grabbed him.”



Story starter by
James Rolleston,
actor:

“A bright light blinded Nico and he struggled to open his eyes. Confused, he slowly looked down and saw his arms and legs covered in white plaster casts. He started to remember, a massive hill, his skateboard, a rolling ball with a dog in hot pursuit, and then being airborne.”

USING STORY STARTERS

Story Starters can be used in a variety of ways to help boys engage with writing and inspire them to write more. The videos provide many opportunities for watching, discussing, responding, recording, clarifying, communicating, reflecting, comparing, contrasting, evaluating and writing.

The teacher should be explicit that one of the main purposes of this resource is to help the boys see why getting better at writing is important. Taking the time to reflect on how each use of the resource has helped their motivation to write (or not) is also important. This gives the teacher information about what has worked and what hasn't so that they can adjust their use of the resource next time.

THE BOYS WRITE THE REST OF THE STORY AFTER THEY HAVE WATCHED ONE OF THE “WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?” ANIMATED VIDEOS.

- The teacher shows one of the “What happens next?” animated videos, which stops at “What happens next?” The boys write the rest of the story individually or together as a group.
- The stories the boys write are shared by reading them to each other, making an audio recording, making a video recording or even in groups acting out their stories.

THE OPENING SENTENCES ARE USED TO GENERATE IDEAS.

- One of the story starters from the roles models is read out to a group of boys. Working together the boys brainstorm possible ideas for the story, then plan and write a story. The complete story animated video of the story starter can be shown to the boys at a later date so they can see how other boys their age developed the story.

THE ROLE MODEL VIDEOS ARE USED AS A CATALYST FOR STORY WRITING.

- The videos of the role models could be shown to the boys and used as a catalyst for planning and writing stories. For example, after watching Levi Hawken's video boys could generate ideas for a story involving skateboarding or breaking bones. After watching Bret McKenzie's video, boys could write song lyrics or a comedy skit.
- Viewing the role model's videos is also a great starting point for talking about, and writing for, different purposes. For example, John Schwalger talking about how he uses writing to prepare for a professional rugby game is a great way to show boys how writing is used in many different situations for many purposes.

THE COMPLETE STORY ANIMATED VIDEOS CAN BE STOPPED AT DIFFERENT PLACES IN THE STORY TO FOCUS ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF WRITING.

- Watching and working out how the writer has embedded cultural knowledge into the story or how they have joined different ideas and different parts of the story together is a great way to learn about the deeper features of writing and about structure.

THE VIDEOS CAN BE USED TO INCREASE THE RELEVANCE OF WRITING FOR EACH BOY.

- By listening to the discussion following the watching of an animated video or role model video, useful information can be gained and next step's formulated for each boy. For example, after watching Nua Finau's video, listening to the response to “What type of questions do TV presenters ask to get great answers?” a teacher could decide the next step for a boy is to learn how to write open questions rather than ones that can be answered with one word.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to the groups of boys from Newtown School (Wellington) and Evans Bay Intermediate School (Wellington) who helped with the development of this resource. In particular for the ideas they came up with, which were used to develop the animated stories.

Thank you to the role models who provided insight into their working lives and how writing plays a part in it, and for their opening sentences.

HOW TO HELP BOYS LEARN

RESEARCH

Learners, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, age or any other characteristic only learn when they are motivated to learn and are engaged with what is to be learnt. The evidence is that boys are not achieving as well as girls in reading and writing. The issue then, is how best to engineer learning environments that they find motivating and engaging. There is much research available that provides guidance with this.

The *Best Evidence Synthesis Diverse Students*¹ (2003) was designed to provide a collation of the evidence of what works within the context of diverse classes of students which is the reality for New Zealand teachers. Ensuring that boys learn and achieve as well as girls is one of the problems of diversity that teachers face. This resource specifically draws on many of the aspects listed in the *Best Evidence Synthesis*:

- Teaching and tasks are structured to support students' active learning orientations.
- Students help each other with resource access and provide elaborated explanations.
- Pedagogical practice is appropriately responsive to the interdependence of socio-cultural and cognitive dimensions.
- Relevance is made transparent to students.
- Ways of taking meaning from text, discourse, numbers or experience are made explicit.
- Teaching builds on students' prior experiences and knowledge.
- Student diversity is utilised effectively as a pedagogical resource.
- Teaching is responsive to all learners
- Students have opportunities to resolve cognitive conflict.
- Optimal use is made of complementary combinations of teacher-directed groupings, co-operative groups, structured peer interaction and individual work (including homework) to facilitate learning cycles.
- Tasks and classroom interactions provide scaffolds to facilitate student learning
- Students receive effective, specific, appropriately frequent, positive and responsive feedback.
- Teaching promotes metacognitive strategy use (e.g. mental strategies in numeracy) by all students.
- Teaching scaffolds reciprocal or alternating tuakana teina roles in student group, or interactive work.
- Teaching promotes sustained thoughtfulness (e.g. through questioning approaches, wait-time, and the provision of opportunities for application and invention).

Additional research has provided practical strategies for teaching boys that we have used to critique and shape the resources.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE >

1: <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>

HOW TO HELP BOYS LEARN CONTINUED

An international study by Richard Hawley and Michael Reichert² examined the narratives submitted by teachers and boys from 18 schools representing the United States, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa of specific lessons and practices that they deemed especially effective.

“The successful lessons fell into the following eight general categories, each of which expresses a dominant feature of the lesson’s reported success:

- *Lessons that produced products*
- *Lessons structured as games*
- *Lessons requiring vigorous motor activity*
- *Lessons requiring boys to assume a role or responsibility for promoting the learning of others*
- *Lessons that required boys to address “open,” unsolved problems*
- *Lessons that required a combination of teamwork and competition*
- *Lessons that focused on boys’ personal realization (their masculinity, their values, their present and future social roles)*
- *Lessons that introduced dramatic novelties and surprises*

Nearly every reported lesson included multiple elements, as when a teacher devises a game in which boys form teams to create a product that will be judged competitively. It appeared increasingly clear to us as we reviewed the teacher responses that these lessons had a distinct for-boys cast, a finding roundly confirmed by the boys themselves.”

Story Starters is a resource that is specifically designed to be used in ways that tick the majority of these features.

In summary, these resources are designed to engage and motivate boys because:

- Content has been designed by boys for boys
- The content is fun – in a boyish sort of way
- They involve videos that require the boys to address open, unsolved problems
- They involve team work
- They enable teachers to engage with humour with the boys sense of fun and drama
- They enable boys to connect with the teacher as relational learners (Wayne Martino, 2008³)

Story Starters is not a panacea for boys’ underachievement but, in the hands of a teacher who is keen to adjust his or her teaching to be responsive and to motivate and engage boys, it will prove a useful and fun resource.

2: Hawley, R., & Reichert, M. (2009). *Teaching boys: A global study of effective practices*. Pawling, NY: The International Boys’ School Coalition.

<http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/604-hawley.aspx>

3: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Martino.pdf>

CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Story Starters is a resource to support teachers in achieving the vision and objectives of The New Zealand Curriculum, and in particular the achievement of boys in writing.

“Literacy in English gives students access to the understanding, knowledge, and skills they need to participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of New Zealand and the wider world.

To be successful participants, they need to be effective oral, written, and visual communicators who are able to think critically and in depth.”

The New Zealand Curriculum, page 18

“As language is central to learning and English is the medium for most learning in the New Zealand Curriculum, the importance of literacy in English cannot be overstated.”

The New Zealand Curriculum, page 16

ENGLISH LEARNING AREA

SPEAKING, WRITING, PRESENTING:

Level 3 Achievement objectives

- Students will integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies with developing confidence to identify, form, and express ideas.
- Students will show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.
- Students will select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.
- Students will use language features appropriately, showing a developing understanding of their effects.
- Students will organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Level 4 Achievement objectives

- Students will integrate sources of information, processes, and strategies confidently to identify, form, and express ideas.
- Students will show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.
- Students will select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.
- Students will use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.
- Students will organise texts using a range of appropriate structures.

KEY COMPETENCIES:

Thinking

Using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas.

Using language, symbols, and texts

Working with, and making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed, representing and communicating information, experiences, and ideas.

Relating to others

Relating to others is about interacting effectively with a diverse range of people in a variety of contexts, including listening, recognising different points of view, negotiating, and sharing ideas.

Participating and contributing

Being actively involved in communities and drawing together for purposes such as learning, work, celebration, or recreation.