Making Monsters

By Gavin Stewart

This exercise is something that I devised after a specific request from a teacher who wanted to use the Pokemon™ obsession of her class to good effect. Its principles are based on the workshop ideas outlined by Peter Sansom in ‘Writing Poems’ (Bloodaxe 1994). The idea is to lead the writing away from pre-conceived monsters to personally conceived monstrous characters.

Start reading

Read Making Monsters with the children. The children can do the activity that follows individually or collaboratively, pooling and discussing their ideas in small groups.

Let’s get writing

On the Make a Monster activity page, ask the children to start listing parts of the body. Hair, eyes, ears, nose etc.... down to the toes! As this is a monster, encourage them to get a few robot or animal body parts (such as tentacles, fangs or claws) into the list too. The activity asks the children to think about non-corporeal attributes of monsters as well, like voice and smell, as these are useful words for triggering descriptions later in the exercise.

Now, on the same page, get the children to start listing things that they hate. Ask them to think about why they hate the things that they have written down. The aim of this exercise is to draw attention to the power of similes, so ideally it should be some attribute that will be fitted into a descriptive sentence.

e.g. (with reference to the Making Monsters poem): I hate sago because it is slimy.

Making connections

In the next stage of the activity, ask the children to select a body part from their list and link it to one of their hates. (For groups that have not come across the idea of simile before, this exercise works best when you provide them with the words ‘as’ and ‘like’ as well.)

e.g. Her/His/Its tongue is as slimy as cold sago pudding.

By linking up the hates with the body parts and adding the starting sequence (*insert name here*’s the monster that I made up last week...) each student has the beginnings of a poem.

Creating a name

Finally, of course, the monsters need names! There are many ways of doing this but one way that works well (and also gets the class thinking about syllables and sounds) is to get each member of a small group or table to donate a syllable to their friends. A group of students named Gavin, Mandra, Moniza & Lois came up with ‘Gadrazalo’.

Learning Objectives

Y4 To clap out and count the syllables in each line of regular poetry
Y6 To investigate humorous verse
Y6 To experiment with language, e.g. creating new words, similes and metaphors
Making Monsters

Bunizoolo's the monster
I made up last week.
A monster so scary
I'm now losing sleep..!

It has quibbles for flesh
It has sago for skin
Its voice is a sermon
On Original Sin

It has spokesmen for spikes
And cutbacks for claws
Its ribs are all wonky
Like half-opened drawers

It has barbed-wired feet
And OFSTED-ing arms
When springing it sounds
Like an intruder alarm

It has landmines for lungs
And a heartful of haste
Its clothes are all pressed
Make me feel outta place

It has tax-forms for teeth
And hang-nails for eyes
Its head is the shape
of an old kipper tie

It has breath like a dog
A smile like a wake
And a face that's as sad
as a burnt bit of cake

Bunizoolo's a monster
Brought out of my mind
When you look there for monsters
Beware of your finds!

Gavin Stewart
MAKE A MONSTER

1 Imagine you’re creating a monster. What body parts will you give it? How will its voice sound? What will it smell like? List your ideas here:

2 Now make a list of things you hate – there might be foods you find revolting or things you don’t like doing. Say what it is about them that makes you hate them.

3 Now link up the body parts and the things you hate to describe your monster. What name will you give it?

...............’s the monster
I made up last week.
A monster so scary
I’m now losing sleep!
It has...

4 Write out your poem on a separate page.

NAME:

I HATE
BECAUSE

POET’S TIP
Use your senses: which smells, sights, sounds, textures or tastes do you hate?