MESSAGES FROM THE HEART SCARAB TO THE HEART

BY CHRISSIE GITTINS

To introduce the idea that we can lie and make things up in our writing, play the ‘truth, lie, fantasy’ game with the children. Give out the accompanying activity sheet and ask them, without showing anyone else, to write down three pieces of information about themselves – one true, one a lie, one a fantasy. You may need to give an explanation of the subtle difference between lie and fantasy – something like ‘a fantasy is something you would like to happen, whereas a lie is a downright untruth’.

How to play
When I do this activity with a group I usually go first – reading out all three, and then asking someone to challenge me as to which one is which. Then throw it open to the floor. The one who guessed mine correctly gets to say his or hers and choose a challenger, and so it goes on. The class may need a gentle reminder at first not to specify which is a lie, which is true etc, before they read out.

Explaining the background
Now direct the students to the picture of the heart scarab on the accompanying sheet. Explain that a heart scarab is an Egyptian amulet that was placed over the heart. Underneath it is inscribed a spell which warns the heart not to give away any guilty secrets during the ‘Weighing of the Heart’ ceremony. This would jeopardise the chance of the spirit making it to the afterlife.

Generating ideas
Read the poem Messages from the Heart Scarab to the Heart with the students. Without discussing the poem start to collect ideas for lines from the students. Talk about different qualities of naughtiness – silly, serious, daft, nonsensical, ingenious, irritating. Veto death and destruction if you need to.

Get writing
Invite the students to draft their own poems. Ask everyone to decide which are their two best lines and read these out round the class. Discuss where these lines should be placed in the poem. First and last? Point out the poet’s tip on the accompanying sheet and ask the students to redraft and then read out their completed poems.
MESSAGES FROM THE HEART SCARAB TO THE HEART

Don’t tell I stole from my Mum’s purse to buy the Bunty,
don’t tell I ran in front of a car to avoid Barry Smith,
don’t tell I stitched an aeroplane to the sky

Don’t tell I ate a whole bag of Thornton’s
Continental Chocolates from my landlady’s cupboard,
don’t tell I took a razor to the soles of the shoes
I was supposed to shine,

Don’t tell I cut the string on my neighbour’s garden chimes,
don’t tell I put a dustbin through the sacristy window,
don’t tell I touched the curlew’s egg.

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1. Without showing anyone, write down three pieces of information about yourself – one that’s true, one that’s a lie, and one that’s a fantasy (about something you’d like to happen).

1. **TRUTH:**

2. **LIE:**

3. **FANTASY:**

2. Write a poem with your own messages from a heart scarab.

**POET’S TIP**

Place lines next to each other according to their tone – an absurd line next to a shocking line, an innocent line next to an outrageous line.

The Ancient Egyptians placed heart scarabs over the hearts of people when they died. On the underside of the scarab was a spell asking the heart to keep certain things secret.

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