

WorkPost My day as a . . . children's storyteller



■ **I WANT TO TELL YOU A STORY** Evening Post features writer Jenny White with storyteller David Pitt and children of Trallwn Primary School, Swansea. D050422/2098/JC

Dream job with fairytale ending

The latest in our monthly series when a reporter tries out a different job for the day. Here JENNY WHITE spends the day as a storyteller's assistant.

D ID YOU know that tiny Tinkerbell-style fairies are a fairly modern invention? The older the fairytale, the larger the fairies are.

This is just one of many fascinating facts I've learnt by being a storyteller's assistant.

Listening to David Pitt (The Crow Man) speak to a transfixed class of children at Trallwn Primary, I also learn about the origins of the phoenix and why the mad hatter was mad.

David is unusual among storytellers in that his stories all lead into activities.

Today he is telling dragon stories, then he will help the class make their own dragon masks.

He has come equipped with everything the children will need, from dozens of pairs of scissors to all the colourful, sparkly things that will be used as decoration.

I'm helping with Ms Hopkins' class, a truly delightful, well behaved group of eight and nine year olds.

When David has finished explaining how to make the masks, we move around the class carrying staplers, stickers and bits of card.

The design is simple but very effective and even I can handle the bits that need adult assistance — stapling the head band and attaching the top of the mask.

The children take care of the rest — all they need from us is occasional bit of help or encouragement. They are engrossed in the task which, as well as being fun, fulfils a whole list of National Curriculum requirements.

"I could get a whole term's work out of this," says class teacher Ms Hopkins, who has stayed in the room throughout.

She explains that David's visit is a springboard for a wealth of other activities, from maths, reading and writing through to design technology.

"The children all have the same shared experience to contribute in class discussion," she adds. "It

also targets all abilities so everybody will respond on some level."

Head teacher Mr Starkey is also impressed. "One of the class just repeated one of the stories almost word for word," he tells me. He invited David into the school on the strength of recommendations from other schools: "We are always looking for opportunities where we can bring the children's learning to life," he explains.

After break the children finish their dragon masks and gather round for another story. Watching David, I have to admit I'd find his job difficult.

He is a talented and unself-conscious performer who holds the children's attention effortlessly. He's also quite happy to walk around the room wearing a feathered hat and banging a gong.

Later, I ask how he manages to remember the stories.

"You have to be able to distil a story down to its basic images so you can remember it," he explains. "I remember stories as a series of images, like cartoon strips." When he asks if the class want one last story they give a

Key SKILLS

If you want to be a storyteller and workshop leader you'll need:

- **A good understanding of the National Curriculum.**
- **To be able to work well with children.**
- **The ability to work by yourself and to plan ahead.**
- **To be flexible in your response because every group is different, and you have to pitch the session accordingly.**
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loud chorus of, "YES," and it's hard not to join in.

They may be learning, but as far as the children are concerned it's just great fun.

I have to agree. I wish I could stay a little while longer — but I am relieved I didn't have to tell the stories.

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