# Alex Rider: Story Writer Resource Kit

A National Literacy Trust resource

## How to Use

Writing for purpose and audience is a huge element in the new curriculum and for pupils is one of the most motivating aspects of the writing process. What greater motivation than to have a story starter from one of the world's most famous authors, Anthony Horowitz, to inspire narrative writing this term.

Two resources are available to support the integration of this competition into the curriculum; this *Story Writer Resource Kit* and the literacy based, cross –curricular *Experiential Learning Kit.*

The two kits have been designed to provide as much flexibility as possible. So whether you are having a one day creative writing workshop to enable your pupils to enter the competition and produce their own winning story, or if you are looking to develop a whole unit of work around narrative with the competition as your final outcome, there is support and inspiration to help. However, if you really want to go to town and immerse pupils in the world of Alex Rider, spies and deadly villains then a whole literacy topic, based on experiential learning principles and reaching across the curriculum can be found in the secret mission set out in the *Experiential Learning Toolkit.*

The choice is yours!

## A Sense of Adventure

The emphasis on the entire writing process in both the KS2 and KS3 curriculum for writing is a welcome one and enables time to be spent on planning, drafting, editing and proofing. This time means that immersion and depth in all aspects of narrative can be explored. Let's start with the Big Picture.

Writing short stories, and especially competition winning short stories, is a hard task. 500 words is not a huge amount and so planning and drafting become a key element to practise and develop. Our focus is of course adventure.

### Key Features:

- Encourage pupils to create a class/group poster of everything they know about adventure stories. Can they list any adventures stories they have read or films watched that fit the adventure genre? Alex Rider fans, of course, will have a host of knowledge to draw on. As they begin to brainstorm their ideas encourage them to bring together the key features and elements of adventure

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stories using their knowledge of stories read and watched to exemplify their thoughts.

See the *key features resource sheet* to support.

Hopefully pupils will be familiar with the Alex Rider series but if you have some new to the books, starting with *Stormbreaker* as a whole class reader would be the perfect way to begin to bring adventure alive.

- Pupils could begin a writer's scrapbook or mini journal to jot down features they notice, ideas that arise and top tips. My favourite Alex Rider tip is… *The worse the villain, the greater and more unpleasant their death!*
- Watch the video of *Stormbreaker* as a whole class but with a writer's eye. As they watch the video encourage them to note down key features and techniques of adventure stories; what characters are typical, what about those hooks that draw us in, or the choice of location to build suspense. Make sure you add in mini breaks all the way through for pupils to discuss what they have noticed in groups and at the end of the film collaborate and add any new features or examples to the class/group posters.

## The Three 'P's

Narrative of course hangs on the three 'p's; people, places and problems. A great short story sees expert crafting of these key elements together to hook us in as readers and take us on a journey of adventure. As writers we tend to plan in a myriad of different ways; some start with character and from that flows plot, some with a central idea and sometimes the stories just come. Short stories because of their succinct nature tend to require more structure and planning.

Anthony Horowitz has given pupils the perfect opening to spark ideas. Pupils can use the opening itself, use it as a template for creating their own ( a character bored / daydreaming in school or at home / walking through a park who notices something they perhaps should not have seen …) or invent their own opening to draw the reader in. Then it is a great idea to spend some time asking questions.

See the *questions cards* to support

In small groups pupils use the cards as a scaffold to discuss possible scenarios for their own stories.

For further inspiration watch the 'Anthony Horowitz Live' video www.youtube.com/alexriderinsider where the master himself talks about his own inspirations and writing process.

By now pupils should begin to have an idea of key elements they want to write about. These need to be expanded and developed and an overall structure sketched out.

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## Structure and plot

As pupils begin to consolidate their thoughts, you may want to support them by using a planning grid to help structure and hone ideas (500 words is not terribly long!)
See *example planning grid.*
The planning follows a basic adventure story plot pattern and naturally can be adapted. More sophisticated stories can have multiple dangers and threats which build increasing intensity at each turn, new characters can be introduced who either help or hinder but often with short stories there may not be time for more complex plots. However a twist at the end is perfectly possible or the implication of a sequel …

## Creating characters

*"Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations."*

Ray Bradbury, Zen in the Art of Writing

One of the key elements of adventure stories is the central role of our main character. Someone we can identify with, someone we want to overcome the dangers and threats they are presented with and someone who, as we read a story, becomes alive and real. Think Alex Rider! Work on characters with pupils is key.

Encourage pupils to create their own character study before writing. They need to jot down everything they can possibly think about to do with him / her. Only a small portion of this information may make its way into the story itself but the process of development means that we as authors get to know our characters well, how they might react in a given situation and how others are likely to react to them. Mind maps are a great way to capture ideas from the character's backstory, their family, favourite foods and films, etc. What makes them happy or laugh out loud? What makes them sad? Appearance and personality; how do they move, do they have a special mannerism or a phrase they always use?

Encourage pupils to work in pairs to ask each other about their characters. When they don't know enough or want more information encourage a 'tell me more about' approach to help build a full picture.

If there are minor characters who will also play a key role, encourage a similar approach but less detail may be needed.

Creating the perfect villain is essential in an adventure story and some of the Alex Rider villains are the most vivid you can possibly imagine, and of course naming them is perhaps one of the most fun (and effective) techniques to use! Dr Hugo Grief and Yassen Gregorovich are two of my favourites.
Click here for a video of Anthony Horowitz exploring and discussing the creation of his top 5 villains: www.youtube.com/alexriderinsider

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Drama is always great for building character. Once the character studies are complete you could hot seat a few and ask them any questions you like, their creator, in role, should be able to answer!

## Bringing locations alive

Great location writing means that when you close your eyes, the author has done such a great job that you have a vivid image of the setting in your mind. You can see the characters within the setting, feel the atmosphere and even spot those details, which may become important in the plot.

Good location writing is both about poignant choice of vocabulary for description and use of figurative language – two excellent elements to explore.

Firstly explore great examples of location writing in adventure. Two of the best from *Stormbreaker* to use would be the description at the outset of the book when Alex visits J.B Stryker's, the scrapyard (beginning at page 24) and the atmosphere and sense of intrigue created from the description of The Royal & General 'Bank' (beginning at page 38) which of course when we read we soon get the inkling that perhaps this is not a bank at all.

Encourage pupils to first express and discuss how the descriptions make them feel and the images they have in their minds – could they for example draw what they have read? Then in groups collaborate to explore how the author created such a vivid effect, what tools and techniques did he use? If we can identify them and know how to use them we can steal them for our own writing. Careful focus on elements and objectives needed to improve the writing for our pupils from the NC Programmes of Study and Grammar Appendix at this point will help focus on improving the quality of the writing.

When thinking of our own choice of locations, use of a senses grid can be an excellent way to help focus description and choose vocabulary to bring the writing alive.

| | | |
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| What can you see? | What can you hear? | What about smell? |
| What do you feel when: a) you first approach and b) when you enter the location? | What else do you notice? | |

Use of simple senses poetry writing and guided drama visualisations can also be used for good effect.

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## Time to Write

Get pupils to talk through their stories to each other using their plans and then create a quiet space for writing. The joy of the new curriculum is that drafting, proofing and editing are all part of the process, which means time to read aloud stories when drafted and encouraging collaborative discussion to support editing are all vital and time should be given to these elements. The incentive is high as why bother to now proof and publish? Well, we are writing for a purpose, they will be read by a panel of judges including Anthony Horowitz's editor and don't forget those prizes … Good Luck!

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