



Changing life stories

# Beast Quest Adventures in Literacy

A National Literacy Trust resource

## Fight the beasts; fear the magic

An addictive and all-engaging journey into the fantasy world of Avantia complete with wizards, heroes, magic and of course an array of deadly beasts to overcome! The ever popular *Beast Quest* books provide a wonderful stimulus for reading and writing in all shapes and forms; narrative, non-fiction, drama and poetry.

The first series of books follows the journey of two unlikely heroes – Tom, a seemingly ordinary boy from the village of Errinel, and his new-found friend, the orphan Elenna – in a quest to save the kingdom of Avantia from the Dark Wizard, Malvel.

Aided by their trusted companions, a wolf named Silver and Tom's horse Storm, the two children are charged with the unenviable task of freeing the six protectors of the kingdom from an evil spell. It just so happens that the protectors, now turned destroyers, are six terrifying beasts: a sea serpent, mountain giant, horse-man, snow monster, flame bird and the first beast we are introduced to – Ferno, the Fire Dragon. As Tom and Elenna travel through the land of Avantia, we travel with them across the first series of six books encountering a new Beast with all its particular perils and dangers in each. As the Quest continues the Defenders become our friends and we find out more about Tom's missing father, Taladon the Swift, the Ancient Scripts of the kingdom and the history between the battling wizards. It's an enticing adventure which grips young readers and draws them into this exciting, addictive and magical world.

We start with Tom's accidental recruitment as a knight for the realm and his first beast challenge against Ferno the Fire Dragon. The following activities support the introduction of the series concentrating on the first book and help to immerse and engage pupils in the world of Avantia through a range of activities to develop reading and writing in context. Join our *Beast Quest Adventures in Literacy* for a whole half-term theme or dip in to the activities as incidental reading and writing opportunities to support our Summer Reading Quest.

## Beginning with the end in mind...

We know that all good planning starts with knowing where we are going and what we want to achieve. The perfect narrative outcome for a whole unit, and one pupils naturally move towards, is writing their own *Beast Quest* story. Each book follows a familiar plot pattern which gives an easily replicated structure and allows pupils to use this structure while putting their imaginative efforts into exploring and creating their own interesting and exciting characters and settings. Knowing from the outset that they will have the opportunity to write their own quest means that all the literacy activities immersing them into the world of Avantia can be used to feed their imagination and give a richness and purpose to their reading and writing.

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T: 020 7587 1842 W: [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) Twitter: @Literacy\_Trust Facebook: nationalliteracytrust

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## Exploring structure

As you begin to read *Ferno, the Fire Dragon* with pupils use the Avantia map to encourage oral retelling of the story as you go along. Pupils can make and illustrate their own story maps and add details and their own observations along the way, plotting where they think Tom's house might be in Errinel or the site of the village square. Being in charge of their own detailed map also encourages close reading of the book; where the river is, the palace courtyard, the towering city walls and even smaller details like the larger pillar behind the King's chair. Retelling the story in pairs and groups using the maps helps embed the story and its structure and will help bring the kingdom of Avantia alive.

- Use the ***Ferno Story Mountain*** (see below) to help explore the story structure of the first book, using the title chapters as a guide.
- Encourage pupils to begin to plan and develop their own ideas for a Beast Quest as you explore the book further. You can use the ***New Beast Quest Mountain*** as a planning guide, which keeps much closer to the original story line while still encouraging pupils to choose their own beast and settings.

## Writing opportunities galore!

Whilst building to a final narrative outcome at the end of the unit, so many opportunities for other forms of writing can be used to engage pupils.

**Writing in role** and rewriting the book's climax as Tom comes face-to-face with the dragon but this time from his horse Storm's perspective, or through the eyes of Silver, the Wolf, is a lovely activity.

**Advert for a Hero:** Tom, rather by accident (or is it fate?) becomes the chosen one to attempt the quest after Sir Caldor the Brave had already failed. Design an advert for the ideal knight; what qualities would King Hugo and Aduro the good wizard want in their chosen hero to defeat the six beasts?

**A Letter Home:** Tom must leave his home and his uncle and aunt to pursue the quest for Aduro and the King. Unfortunately he is sworn to secrecy about the beasts' existence and his journey. He doesn't want to worry them but he will have to lie to reassure them he is well. What excuse could he find and what might he write in his letter home?

**Mystery Blaze Blasts Errinel!** There is a mysterious fire in the fields of the village, no one knows how it started but rumours abound and legends are discussed. Eyewitnesses think they saw a large shadow in the sky... Ask the children to write a front page news report from the *Errinel Herald* on the day disaster struck. Lots of drama and role play opportunities will arise as you interview the villagers and even Tom himself to explore the panic and peril creeping into the kingdom.

**Prequel:** At the beginning of the book is a short prologue of Caldor the Brave's encounter with the Fire Dragon. Perhaps we could go even further back and write a prequel to the book when the beasts were in fact protectors of the realm and not the destroyers they became, or even the story of how the wizard Malvel turned to his evil ways.

**Book of Beasts:** Aduro has already compiled an amazing Book of Beasts which details beasts from across the series of books. Perhaps pupils could go one step further to create a class

encyclopedia or a series of reports with details of all the new beasts they are about to invent for their own quests. Use the **Beast Report Planner** (see below) to help structure your reports.

**Majestic Menu:** As Tom enters the palace he is taken through the court kitchens and into the King's dining chamber. A long dining table is set with candles. Can pupils imagine what the King of Avandia would have on his menu for the evening and design and display it beautifully?

**Author Facts:** With such popularity and profile, pupils may want to find out about the author who created Avandia and more beasts than you could ever imagine. Encourage pupils to research Adam Blade. Get them to use the Beast Quest website biography [www.seaquestbooks.co.uk](http://www.seaquestbooks.co.uk) and further research to create an author fact file and keep adding questions they'd like to ask the author as they progress through the books.

## Bringing Beast Quest alive: exploring characters

As the first story develops we learn more about our brave Defenders and more too about the world they inhabit; the village of Errinel, the Grassy Plains and the Forest of Fear.

Cracking characters are the bread and butter of narrative. We want our pupils to explore and respond to characters through their reading, make connections to the characters they love (and love to hate) and develop a love of story through their engagement.

As Tom and Elenna, our Defenders, are constant throughout the first series it would be good to introduce ongoing response activities which can develop as pupils work their way through the reading challenge.

**Create a whole class "role on the wall"** for each character, even better to use a pupil to draw a full size body outline to display and a basket of post-it notes to encourage annotations, questions and knowledge about the characters to be noted down and collated as the books are explored. There are many ways to manage the role on the wall, but our favourite is to make notes around the body outline to do with factual information we know for sure: where they live, appearance, family etc and inside the character make notes about their personality and character traits of which we learn more and more as we discover more about them. Use a specific colour of post-it for questions pupils would like to ask the character.

**Use emotion graphs** to track how Tom and Elenna are feeling throughout each book. When are they the closest friends? When are they feeling brave, feeling scared, feeling lonely and homesick?

**Drama and role play** techniques are often the best way of exploring character and putting ourselves in the character's shoes. Pick an important scene such as when Tom first enters the City and sneaks into the King's dining chamber. Get pupils to read closely and carefully to recreate a freeze frame of the scene as described in the book, ask for improvised action then freeze frame at the moment Tom is discovered and thought-track the main characters.

**Try drawing comparisons and visualisation activities.** Imagine the moment Tom climbs onto the Dragon's head to try to grab his magical collar; take pupils into the hall and draw a huge dragon's head on the floor. As pupils take turns to stand on the image they can imagine what Tom felt like, such a small boy clinging to the head of a Fire Dragon.

**Naming characters:** As pupils begin to plan and create their own characters for their own quests, encourage them to use techniques like Adam Blade such as naming the characters with their traits; Caldor the Brave, Taladon the Swift.

**Art and model-making** are also wonderful tools to help bring characters alive. The beasts of course are very important characters in each book. If pupils find it hard to imagine what Ferno is like, scour the character descriptions in the book to build a picture of his head, his scales, his body, his eyes and use visual literacy to expand pupils' knowledge and experience of dragons: a trailer from *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*; a class reading of the introduction of the Space Bat Angel Dragon from *The Iron Man*. Then encourage pupils to draw or model-make from the details they have collected. As pupils plan and create their own Beast, art and **model-making** are a perfect way to consolidate their ideas to inform their descriptive writing.

**Don't forget your Poetry!** To help expand ideas, explore and write short poems about beasts and dragons. *The Troll* by Jack Prelutsky is a super beast poem and Nick Toczek's excellent collection of Dragon Poems work really well to read and perform, then use as models to rewrite.

## Bringing Avantia alive: exploring settings

Part of the reason pupils love this series of books is that they are drawn into the world of Avantia as Tom and Elenna explore the kingdom through their journey. We move from forest settings to mountains, plains, rivers and ice lands. As pupils plan their own Beast Quest stories they can use the rich variety of settings in Avantia to help plan their own journeys through dangerous lands.

Encourage pupils to design a new map of their own, plotting the journey of their own Defenders to find a beast, referring back to their story plans (***New Beast Quest Mountain***). The more detail and time spent creating their journeys, the better prepared they will be to write their own quest. So have some fun, age your maps or even make them from parchment paper. Explore other map examples; from Treasure Island or even the Marauder's Map from Harry Potter – magical just like Tom's map from Aduro!

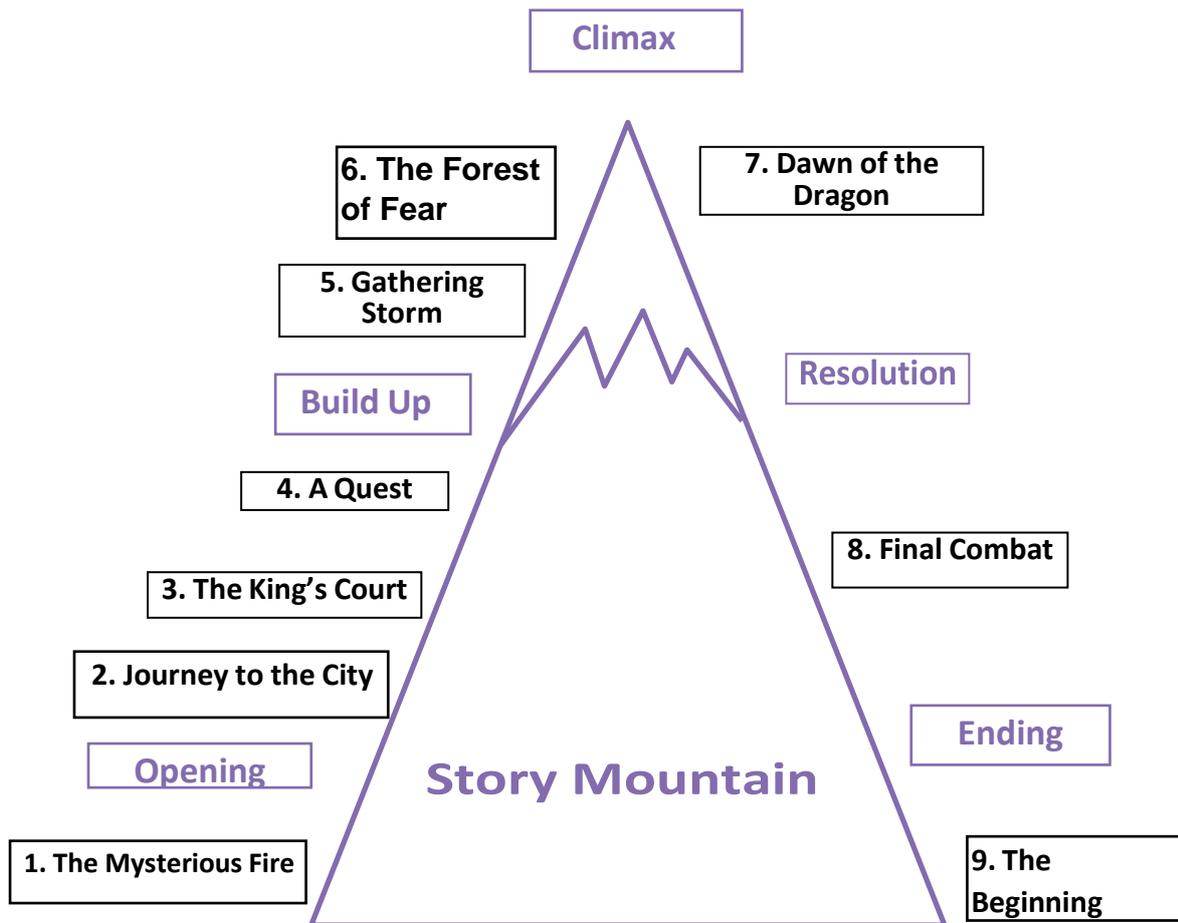
Get pupils to name their created locations using abstract nouns like the Forest of Fear. How about the Woods of Terror or the Desert of Desolation (a little alliteration adds that extra hook!). Or go even further and explore personification with the Wailing Woods or the Moaning Mountains.

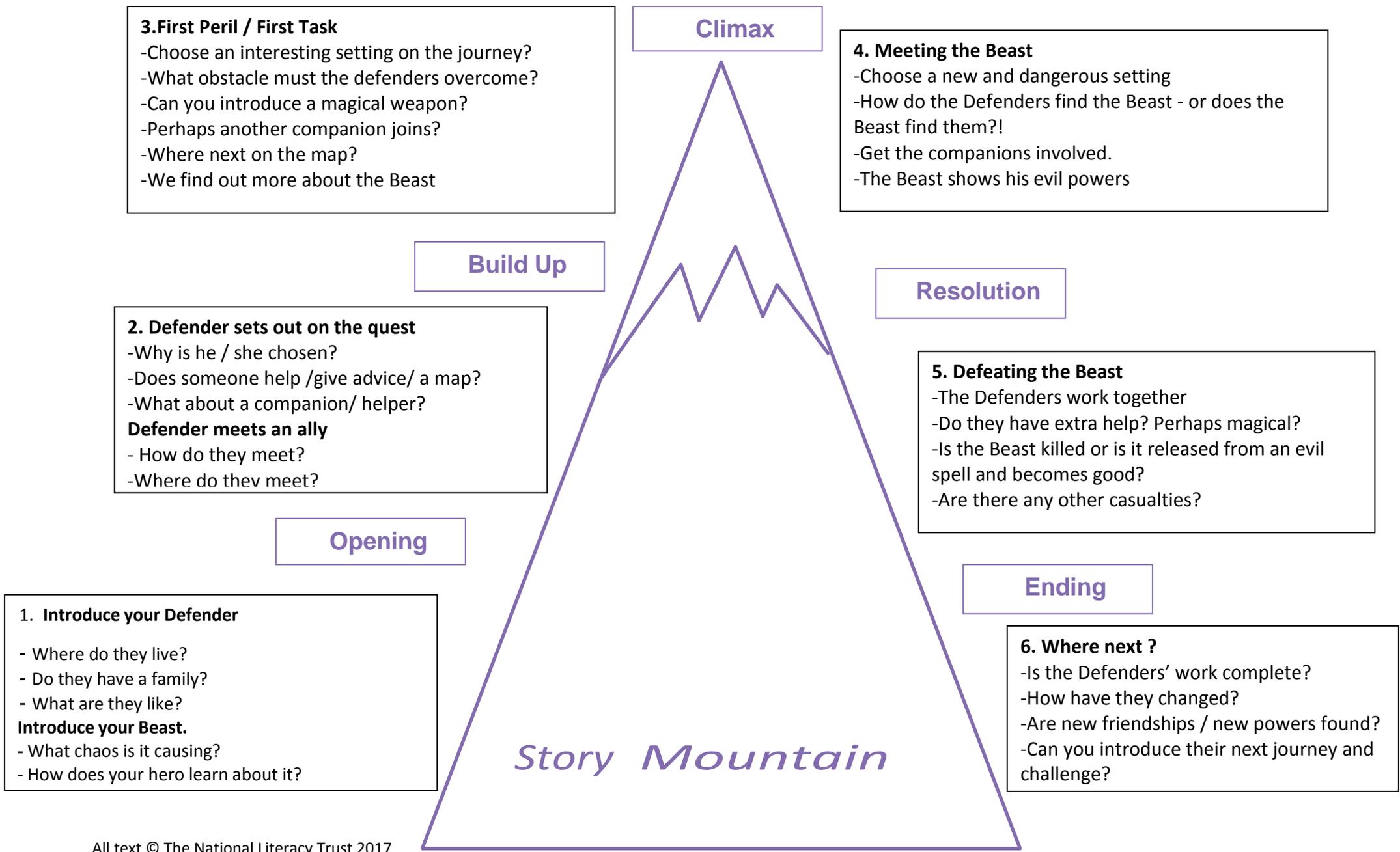
Poetry again is a great way to build a vivid image of a location. First, try a drama soundscape activity (see <http://dramaresource.com/strategies/soundscape> for an excellent example along with lots of other super drama activities). Then move on to a short senses poem. *The Sound Collector* by Roger McGough is a great model to use as a starting point to create new poems full of the sounds that pupils might find in particular settings.

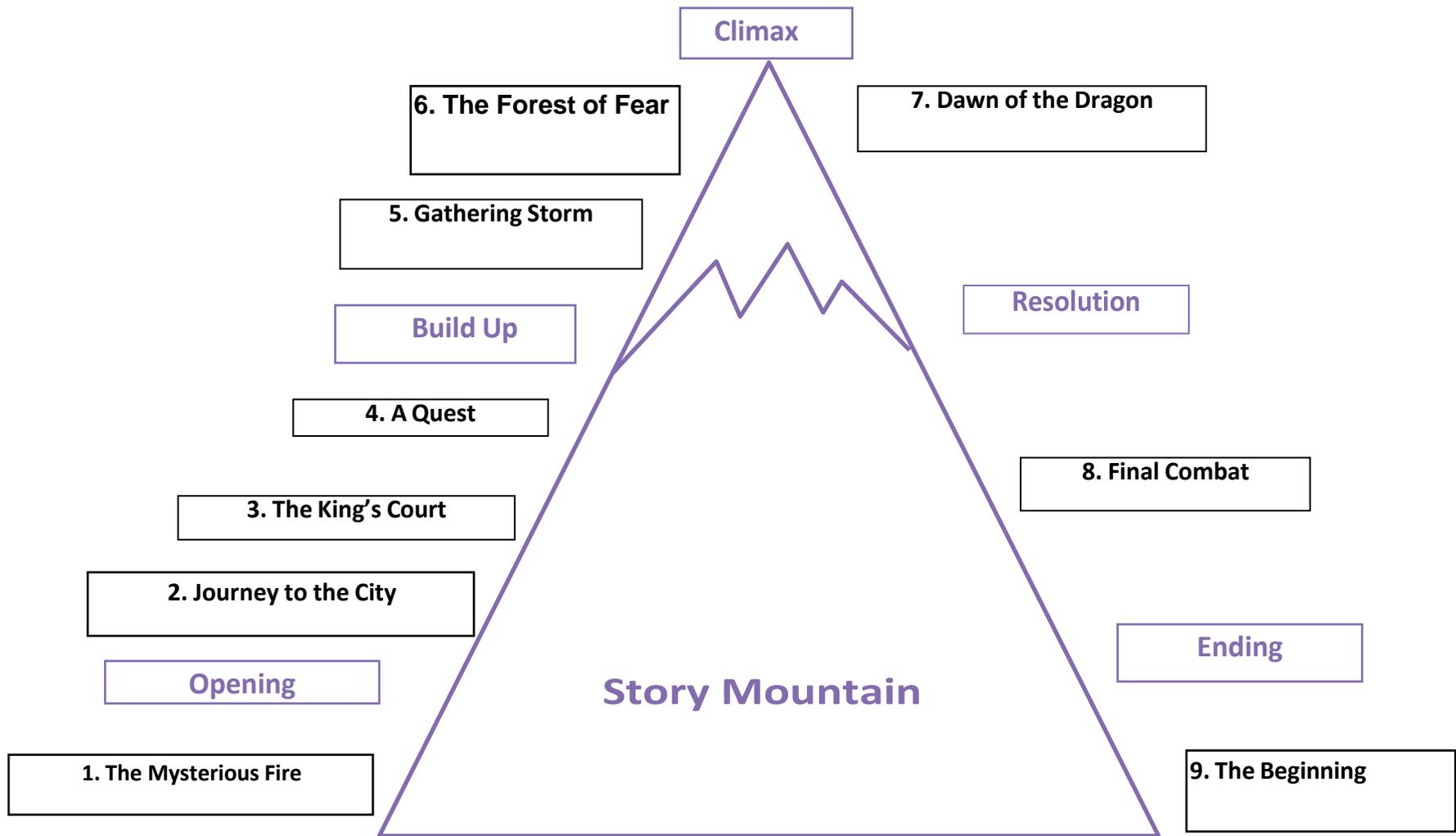
The three 'P's of storytelling should now be in place; people, places and problems. Pupils, now immersed, can go on to create their own Beast Quest stories. Providing book-making templates and allowing time for illustration and publishing will help motivate pupils and make their Beast Quest adventure one they will never forget.

#### Further fun across the curriculum

- Use the Avantia map to create a grid map and practice co-ordinates and compass work. Or create your own version of the game Battleships but trying to locate beasts instead.
- Combine Science and Design & Technology in creating a moving beast complete with glowing bulb eyes or moving parts with links and levers.
- The Avantia map could be used to help explore human and physical features in geography.
- In PE use positional language or the language of turns, half turns, etc. to direct pupils around an Avantian obstacle course.
- Create a class competition ladder for a Beast Quest Tournament. Who can get the highest scores?
- Challenge pupils to create their own version of Top Trumps using the beasts they have created; *age, power, magical level and fright factor*







## Outline plan for a Beast Quest report

Fact File	Example	Notes
<b>Name:</b>	<i>Ferno</i>	
<b>Title:</b>	<i>The Fire Dragon</i>	
<b>Appearance:</b>	<i>coal-black head, jagged wings, slate-like scales ...</i>	
<b>Dwelling Place:</b>	<i>a cave in The Northern Mountains</i>	
<b>Secret Skills:</b>	<i>ability to hypnotize, lethal whipping tail, breathes fire ...</i>	
<b>Magic Powers:</b>	<i>can turn invisible</i>	
<b>Diet:</b>	<i>sheep, foxes, small humans!</i>	
<b>Character Traits:</b>	<i>generally bad tempered, easily annoyed</i>	
<b>Worst Deed to Date:</b>	<i>eating Caldor the Brave</i>	