Foreword

The issue of loneliness among older people is widespread. A simple conversation can make all the difference to a lonely older person and research proves that face to face contact can help to keep older people healthy. Lack of social contact is a known risk factor for poor physical health.

In days gone by, communities were closer-knit; people knew their neighbours and younger people didn’t spend hours socialising with friends online. Today there is a disconnect between younger and older generations. In fact, a recent study by Anchor found that 45% of older people do not feel valued by younger people.

Now, families are more fragmented and loneliness among older people is becoming an epidemic. At Anchor, we know that just one conversation can help to break down those barriers to older people living happily. In our care homes, we talk to our customers about their life history, as a way of getting to know them and learning how best to care for them. We’ve learnt a lot from the people living in our retirement properties, and believe that young people today could gain much from doing the same. Encouraging more contact between young and old people win-win - younger people will learn from the wisdom of the old and an older person’s day will be enriched by the contagious energy of youth.

Introduction

Anchor Life Histories is a unit of work which fits comfortably within strands for Speaking and Listening and Writing. It provides opportunities for developing questioning skills, planning and chronological writing within a real context of talking to and learning from an older person, who may not be known to the children.

There are many opportunities for children to meet and speak to older members of their community, spending time thinking about and planning for these meetings can provide valuable speaking, listening and writing experience and can enrich the experience for both parties. These conversations can take place in school with older people invited in as visitors, during school visits and field trips or as part of an organised visit to a local day centre, residential home or care facility. Even conversations with grandparents or other family friends and relatives can uncover interesting or helpful information if children take time to plan and ask the right questions.

‘Living history’, where children learn about life and experiences from an older member of the community, is a rich resource. It is recognised to be valuable but often not tapped into by schools.

Note: A certain amount of preparation will be needed beforehand to ensure that there are some willing interviewees at your local care home or wider community. You must also ensure that all the safeguarding considerations and risk assessments comply with school policies.

This unit of work is planned in four developmental phases, from examining and interrogating texts, planning for an interview and then developing and improving writing. It could take from two to four weeks, depending on how many of the speaking and grammar activities teachers wish to include. These notes outline the possible teaching strands and activities for each phase. The end of Key stage learning outcomes for years 5 and 6 that are met by these lessons are highlighted on the right of the planning document.
PHASE 1 – familiarisation with the text/genre:

- continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
- identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing
- identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.

Examine examples of biographical and autobiographical texts.

A biography is a true story written about someone’s life. Famous people that children enjoy reading about are sometimes people from long ago, such as Horatio Nelson or Emily Pankhurst; or from more recent times, such as Neil Armstrong or Anne Frank.

There are a number of biographies and autobiographies available for children to read alone or as part of a guided or group read. Distinguish between a biography, written in a chronological, narrative style, and a non-fiction information book, which will be written and presented in a different style, usually non-chronological, using sub-headings.

Read aloud a section from one of the biographical texts you have selected. Discuss the style of writing: third person, past tense, chronological layout, usually starting at the beginning of a person’s life and moving through their early years, school, work life etc in order.

In pairs or small groups, children could then examine other biographies and autobiographies, noting these features and any similarities and differences (eg autobiographies will generally be written in the first person).

There are lots of interesting biographies written for children available online. www.duckster.com/biography is an American site which has a wide range of biographies of famous people from throughout history.

Discuss why biographies and autobiographies are interesting to read; what can be learnt from them?

Reading and learning about the lives of famous people is essential in school. Children enjoy reading about renowned people’s lives, and really learn a lot of life lessons by reading them. Some children can make life connections to the people that they read about and certainly relate to them.

If you were to write your own autobiography, what information would you include?

How could you organise this logically?

Introduce idea of a time line.

- Ask the children to use the All about me mind map 1 to think of headings they might use to capture information about themselves and then to add details. The chances are that most will have headings such as Pets, Favourite foods, Family. Younger or less able children might find it helpful to use All about me mind map 2, which already has some suggested headings.

- Show them a non-fiction book and explain that although these also tell about a person’s life they tend to be non-chronological. Explain that the story of a person’s life is more linear, in time order.
• Draw a time line and add in milestones in a person’s life. Demonstrate that planning in this way will keep the recount in time order. Ask the children to reorganise their information capture from the mind map onto a time line. Explain that it is possible to talk about their pets but it must be done at the time of their life when they had them. Give time for the children to compare each other’s time lines.

Some children might find it helpful to work on their timelines at home, asking a parent or carer to help them identify one event or memory from each year of their life. Photographs or personal possessions could be used to illustrate timelines and used in a display.

Explore the third person recount.

Teach the difference between direct and reported speech. Discuss which would be more often used in this type of writing.

• Remind the children that writing about someone else is called writing in the third person (he/she/they). Therefore, information about a person’s life would be written in the third person past tense.

For example: Emily Jones was born in London in 1939, just as war broke out. She spent her first few months on earth waiting for the bombs to drop.

• Explain that another option is to mix both direct and reported speech in a piece of text to avoid overlong dialogue exchanges and repetition. This also maintains the past tense.

For example: Emily told her mother that they would have been safer in the country away from the threat of bombing.

• Explain that in direct speech we use the present tense and first person, with speech marks and punctuation.

For example: “We would be safer in the country, Mother,” said Emily, “away from the threat of bombing.”

Practise several of these with the children or use Activity sheet 2.
Imagine you are interviewing a famous person, eg sportsman, musician, historical character, etc. What sort of things would you want to find out?

They should use a time line to plot the significant parts of the person’s life that they would hope to see in their biography. For example, for a famous footballer: birth and early life, schools, career, sporting success, present day.

Do a hot seating activity where one person represents a famous person. Discuss in pairs what sorts of things you would want to find out.

The children should test out their questions, recording their findings on the time line framework.

Encourage children to look at examples of interviews in the media. What kind of questions are used? How are the answers presented? Is there any difference between spoken interviews on TV or the radio, and in print?

If you were to talk to an older person, what might you be able to find out about? This is called a first hand or eye witness account. Why might this be valuable?

As a class or in groups discuss the life span of grandparents and great grandparents. What changes might they have seen? For example, an 85 year old will have been born at a time before mobile phones, television, space exploration, computers or any other electronic devices, and commercial flights for holidays (except for the very few). They will have lived through a world war and seen much political change: Sri Lanka used to be call Ceylon, Russia and many of the Baltic States were the USSR and Britain still had an Empire. Discuss with the children how the experiences of older people might have been very different from what we know today. What would they like to find out about?

Some children will find it easier to plan their questions if the interview focuses on a particular theme, for example childhood, toys, school or memories of a particular place.

Talk about open, closed and supplementary questioning.

- Use a volunteer to model a conversation where you use only closed questions (ones that only require yes/no or a choice of two answers, eg Which do you prefer, black or blue?). Demonstrate that these do not illicit much information.

- Explain that the best information seekers such as news reporters, researchers and so on ask open questions. These allow the respondent to expand on an answer, eg Tell me about the school you went to… or Please explain when you first became interested in rugby and why.
• In pairs, the children should suggest a range of open questions to share with the class.

• Once they are confident about this form of questioning, tell them that they are to be given the opportunity to interview an older person. Their job as investigative reporters is to find out about their lives, experiences and memories. Reporters need to have a list of prepared questions which will start off the exchange. They must then listen to the answers and not be afraid to ask supplementary questions about interesting things they are told. They should also encourage their interviewee to expand on their original facts. Model this with a child, with you asking supplementary questions.

• In pairs or individually, children should use Activity sheet 3 to write open-ended questions related to different parts of a person’s life. This will be their prompt sheet to start the conversation. Explain that they will not be able to prepare the supplementary questions since these depend on what is said in the interview.

• Once the questions are prepared and rehearsed, the roving reporters are ready to conduct their interview.

Some schools host intergenerational lunches or teas, inviting older members of the community into school. These occasions present excellent opportunities to interview visitors.

PHASE3 – writing:

- using the passive voice to affect the presentation of information in a sentence
- using expanded noun phrases to convey complicated information concisely
- using modal verbs or adverbs to indicate degrees of possibility

Identify form, tense, layout and chronological structure of texts and begin to create a marking ladder or success criteria list that identifies features of this type of text.

Ask the children to recap on what features they have noticed should be included in a biographical text. They should create their own marking ladder or success criteria to refer to when writing their own biography. Alternatively, give out Activity sheet 4 and remind the children about each feature.

Look again at the original biographical texts. Discuss how the information collected from the interviews could be presented. Features include: passport style, profile, chronological prose, paragraphs/chapters, headings and sub-headings. (See sample writing scaffolds.)

Model use of the passive voice.

The passive voice is used when the focus is on the action. It is not important or not known, however, who or what is performing the action.

For example: *My coat was moved.*

In this example the focus is on the fact that my coat was moved. I do not know, however, who did it. Sometimes a statement in the passive is more polite than the active voice.

For example: *A mistake was made.*
The focus is on the fact that a mistake was made, but I do not blame anyone (eg You have made a mistake.)

Try a few more examples, with the children changing the active voice to the passive.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They say that buses were more reliable then.</td>
<td>It is said that buses were more reliable then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane rang to complain.</td>
<td>A complaint was made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model an example of writing in the third person, past tense with both reported and direct speech.

For example:

*The book was not on the table. Mr Coleman turned round to face the class. He was very cross. James closed his eyes and slid down low in his seat, waiting for the explosion!*

*“Who moved my book?” thundered Mr Coleman. James had been told that hard backed books would float on water, by Bill. He had learnt not to trust him again!*

*Write up the interview using the key features identified and the new grammatical skills learnt.*

Remind the children to refer to their marking ladder to check that they have included all the features of a chronological report as they present the information. Some children may find it helpful to use some of the prompts or writing scaffolds to help them structure their writing.

Children could use the marking ladders to check each other’s work and to make suggestions for improvement.
PHASE 4 – presentation:

- In Years 5 and 6, pupils’ confidence, enjoyment and mastery of language should be extended through public speaking, performance and debate.

Present information in a variety of ways: displays, books, reading, and possibly revisit interviewees to share the outcomes.

Reflect as a group on what they have learnt from the experience, both in terms of writing but also what they now know about an older generation.

Children may wish to read out their written pieces for an audience and to share what they personally felt they obtained from the experience. This might be done as part of an assembly or a presentation for others in school, parents or possibly for the interviewees themselves.

Alternatively, display the work on ‘living’ biographies and invite the interviewees into school to see it.

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