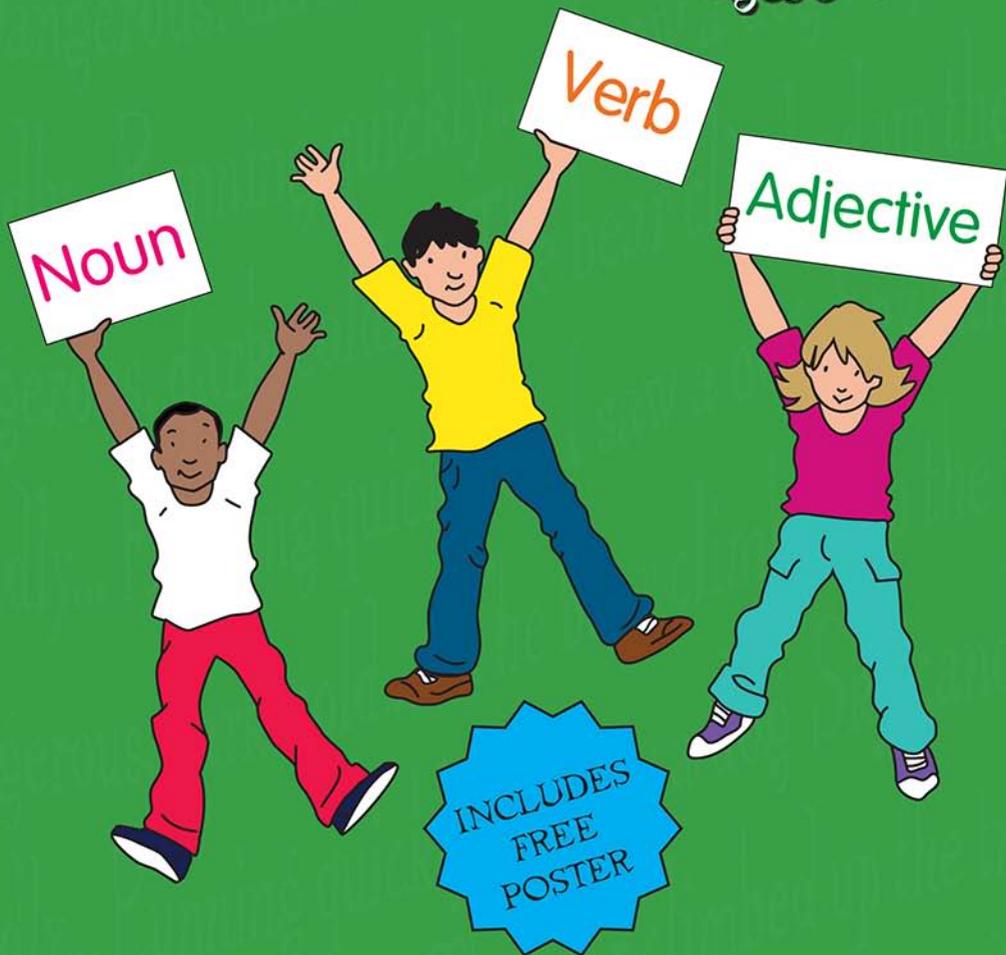


JUMPSTART!

GRAMMAR

Games and activities for ages 6–14



A **David Fulton** Book

Pie Corbett and Julia Strong

JUMPSTART! GRAMMAR

This collection of simple to use, multi-sensory games and activities will jumpstart pupils' understanding of grammar in action. If you are one of the thousands of teachers who feel insecure about how to teach grammar engagingly, and perhaps also lack confidence in your own grammatical knowledge, then *Jumpstart! Grammar* is the perfect book for you.

Fun games will focus first on helping children to hear the difference various types of grammar can make followed by activities to help them understand what different effects you can create with grammar, rather than dwelling on arid naming of parts. Technical terms will only be introduced once the children have established what the various features can do, with a particular focus on those terms that really help children discuss what makes language coherent and effective. By the time the children are asked to use the terminology, they will have a real grasp of what it's good for.

Jumpstart! Grammar will prepare children for any grammar tests on the horizon in an engaging way so that they come to love playing with words and spinning sentences to make ideas dance. And, of course, they will be able to name the parts if that is what is required.

This indispensable, practical book celebrates the joys of language and coherent expression; of finding just the right words or phrases to express what you want to say.

Pie Corbett, educationalist and bestselling author, is well-known for his books on teaching creative writing, as well as many other educational books, schemes and anthologies. Pie writes widely in the educational press, provides training nationally and works as a poet and storyteller in schools.

Pie has written over 200 books and has worked extensively in schools as teacher, headteacher and Ofsted inspector. Some of his bestselling titles include: *Jumpstart! Literacy*; *Jumpstart! Storymaking*; *Jumpstart! Poetry*; *How to Teach Storywriting 4–7*; and *How to Teach Fiction Writing 8–12*.

Julia Strong is a former English teacher and deputy headteacher. She later became deputy director of the National Literacy Trust and director of the National Reading Campaign. She specialises in literacy across the curriculum and now works with Pie Corbett developing Talk for Writing.

Julia has provided training days for hundreds of secondary schools, and some all-age schools, as well as being asked by local authorities to run training courses for headteachers, school librarians and literacy advisers. She has written a range of practical books on literacy across the curriculum as well as secondary school English text books including *English Frameworking* and *Literacy Across The Curriculum: Making It Happen* that have proved to be bestsellers. She also co-authored *Talk for Writing Across The Curriculum (5–12)* with Pie Corbett.

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JUMPSTART! GRAMMAR

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR AGES 6–14

Pie Corbett and Julia Strong

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Introduction



In an article in *The Times* about grammar, Ted Hughes stated that ‘conscious manipulation of syntax deepens engagement and releases invention’. At the time, I had been teaching for a few years and had already found that playing sentence and word games could be an effective way of developing both written style and creativity. We played the games both orally and by writing.

For instance, as a quick start to a lesson I would put on the board a list of dull sentences for the children to improve. Another game that we often played was ‘make a sentence’. I wrote a word and they had to invent a sentence. What I noticed with this game was that starting from one word tended to produce rather dull sentences. However, if I wrote three words (eg *donkey – jelly – because*), the children produced much more inventive sentences. I realised that constraints actually helped the children to become creative.

I also began thinking about how making up a sentence orally made writing easier, especially for anyone who struggled. Often we composed as a class and I used key ‘prompt’ words to help us develop the sentence. For instance, say we started with the word *dog*. We might think of something like, *I saw a dog*. We then used the prompt words and added in extra ideas:

Prompt word	Sentence change
Where?	I saw a dog underneath the table.
When?	I saw a dog late last night.
Which one?	I saw the black, overweight dog.
What?	I saw a dog running down the lane.

The more we played around with sentences, the more the children’s writing developed. My key games were – make a sentence, improve a boring sentence, sentence doctor (spotting mistakes) and joining sentences.

One effect of the games was that the children began to write more quickly, more interestingly and to vary their sentences. What I didn’t realise at the time was that a mix of ‘hear it’, ‘say it’ and ‘write it’ was helping the children internalise the patterns so that they could then innovate.

As the years ran by, I built up a bank of different playful sentence and word games. I learned two key principles. The games worked best where they were related to:

- a. the text type I was teaching;
- b. the patterns that children needed to make progress.

In this way, I began to develop the simple notion that grammar teaching worked most effectively where it was directly related to using grammar as a part of a child’s growing repertoire as a writer. We could look at good examples of high quality writing and discuss how the words were chosen or sentences varied to create effects. We could play around with sentences and word combinations before trying to create the same sort of effects ourselves. This became a form of ‘grammar in action’ or ‘syntactical gymnastics’.

Linked to this idea, I also developed the notion of playing a few quick-fire games at the start of my English lessons in order to tune the children into thinking creatively. The games were an attempt to help children:

- think swiftly;
- generate words and ideas;
- exercise and strengthen their imagination.

All of us have learned the grammar that we use from the constant language interactions around us – from our close relatives, school friends and adults whose talk we hear. Much of this can be strongly influenced if children are read to and read themselves. This learning occurs quite naturally and implicitly. However, the explicit, active teaching of grammar in relation to being a writer, speaker and interested reader can be a powerful part of developing an increasing control over language.

Many schools, over the last ten years through the influence of Talk for Writing, have discovered that the use of actions to support the use of connectives or other language features can be very powerful. This is linked to the simple notion that children need to hear how sentences are spoken, speak sentences aloud, and look at them written down before attempting to write them for themselves. It is impossible to write down different syntactical patterns unless you can say them. The games therefore often call for children to say sentences, read them and manipulate them before writing them. Whilst dictation may seem somewhat old fashioned, it can be used to reinforce sentence patterns as well as helping children think about punctuation.

Whilst there is no evidence that formal, isolated teaching of grammar raises standards in reading and writing, there is some evidence to suggest that teaching it in context can be useful:

A randomised controlled study was conducted in the UK and aimed to explore the effect of contextualised grammar teaching on pupils' writing development. By contextualised grammar teaching, the researchers referred to:

- introducing grammatical constructions and terminology at a point which is relevant to the focus of learning;

- putting the emphasis on effects and constructing meanings, not on the feature or terminology itself;
- ensuring the learning objective is to open up a ‘repertoire of possibilities’, not to teach about correct ways of writing.

Findings from the study were promising, showing a significant positive effect for pupils in the intervention group, taught in lessons using the above principles. They scored higher in the writing tests compared with pupils in the comparison group.¹

... The evidence on sentence combining has found it to be an effective means of improving the syntactic maturity of students in written English between the ages of 5 and 16.²

The key conditions for such teaching would be:

- a. Teach grammatical constructions when they are needed for the text type or to make progress in writing.
- b. Ensure that the focus is on using the feature to create an effect and construct meaning rather than just trying to recall what it is named.
- c. Help the features taught to become part of a young writer’s repertoire, by constantly being used creatively and discussed.

Grammar teaching makes most sense if it is taught as an active process, related to the teaching of writing and reading. Grammatical skill comes before genuine knowledge. By this we mean that spending time thinking about how adjectives are used helps to deepen children’s understanding of the function of an adjective within a sentence. Grammar may be viewed as a set of skills:

- a. choosing the right word for the job;
- b. constructing and manipulating sentences to create different effects;
- c. tying texts together so that writing is linked and flows.

This book provides an overview of grammatical knowledge with a range of possible activities and games that can be adapted and played in the classroom. Many lessons begin with the daily ‘grammar starter’. This is an aspect of writing that is needed to make progress or as part of the text type being studied. During such games, grammatical terminology should be used so that the children gradually build up an understanding of different

grammatical concepts. Grammar is not really ‘knowledge’; rather it is a matter of grasping a ‘concept’. Keep such teaching simple and clear with the focus on gaining control over words, sentences and the flow of writing.

For children to develop their understanding of and skill with grammar, teachers will need to introduce and revisit aspects of writing on many purposeful occasions. This requires constant practice and evaluation of the impact on the reader of varying how sentences are constructed and words chosen. Teachers will need to draw children’s attention to grammatical constructions in reading and demonstrate their use in shared and guided writing. Children should then be expected to ‘have a go’ and evaluate the effectiveness of their writing. In these ways, grammar becomes an active process rather than relying on memory.

Throughout the book we have used the following icons to indicate:



ways of making grammar understanding visual through flip-charting features on posters and displaying them on working walls or washing lines;



how to consolidate understanding through co-constructing toolkits.

The main categories of games are outlined below:

- **Investigating and defining** – looking at texts for certain word classes or types of sentences. What is their function?
- **Imitation** – identifying key patterns that will be needed and inventing further sentences that use the same pattern.
- **Magpieing and collecting** – gathering banks of words, phrases and sentence patterns.
- **Improving** – strengthening the choice of words, the effect of the sentences and the way in which a text coheres.
- **Correcting** – making sentences accurate.
- **Manipulation and joining** – learning how to alter sentences in order to create different effects as well as learning how to link and combine sentences to create paragraphs.
- **Comparing** – comparing word choice, sentences and paragraphs in order to consider the effect of differing word choices, sentence construction and linkage.

- **Cloze procedure** – filling gaps in sentences with words or gaps in texts with sentences.
- **Discussing and using** – constant discussion of words, sentences and texts and the relationships between language construction and the impact on the reader.

Almost all of the games are blueprints and we expect that teachers will provide their own sentences that are related to the text being taught.

It is worth spending some time creating a school overview and system. Each teacher needs to know their contribution to the development of children's understanding about how the English language works but also their ability to accurately and powerfully use it. Teaching should not be through grammar exercises, rather teachers should help pupils 'exercise' their grammar through its constant use in writing and reading. A useful document for planning progression is 'How to plan year-on-year progression' which can be downloaded from <http://www.talk4writing.co.uk/resources/>. It is linked to the Primary Curriculum in England but will be useful to anyone teaching English anywhere.

It might be worth having a grammar quiz every half-term across a school, though of course you will also be able to assess children's ability to use their grammar on a daily basis through their reading and writing. Any such quiz should strike a balance between questions that are about knowledge (eg underline the verb) and usage (eg which of these sentences is punctuated accurately). Remember – in itself, it is pointless to learn what 'modal verbs' might be. How will that help a child make their way through the world? However, what might be useful is to be able to use them effectively. For us, it is the application of grammar in action that not only really deepens understanding of the possibilities of the English language but also makes children more effective as language users.

English is a beautiful language that possesses a multitude of linguistic possibilities. It has been shaped by Shakespeare and many other wonderful writers and speakers. Across the world, the language has many variations and is used for international communication as well as great literatures and language variations.

Effective language users are like chameleons, adapting what they say and how they speak according to audience and purpose, shifting language use

according to the context. We believe every child should be able to adapt their language in this way. This is not just about shifting into Standard English when they need to. It is about being able to argue your case, discuss, explain, inform, instruct, and talk about what has happened as well as enjoying storytelling and poetry. It seems obvious to us that understanding how our language works is not just interesting in itself; it is not just that this will help us understand and learn other languages; it is about helping children develop the ability to use language powerfully to understand themselves, their lives and make their way happily in the world.

Other useful books to help you build confidence with grammar are:

- *Rediscover Grammar with David Crystal*, published by Longman;
- *Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools* by David Reedy and Eve Bearne, published by UKLA;
- *For Who the Bell Tolls* by David Marsh, published by Guardian Books
- Watch Pie talking about ‘grammar in action’ on the Oxford University Press website: <https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/experts/pie-corbett/?view=ProductList®ion=international>.

There are useful resources relating to grammar that can be downloaded from www.Talk4Writing.com.

NOTES

- 1 Myhill, D., Lines, H. and Watson, A. (2011) *Making meaning with grammar: a repertoire of possibilities*. University of Exeter. *Metaphor*, Issue 2, 2011.
- 2 Andrews, R., Torgerson, C., Beverton, S., Freeman, A., Locke, T., Low, G., Robinson, A., Zhu, D. (2004a) ‘The effect of grammar teaching (sentence combining) in English on 5 to 16 year olds’ accuracy and quality in written composition’. In: *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.

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CHAPTER 1

The things

Nouns, adjectives, pronouns and determiners



WHAT ARE NOUNS?

Use these games to draw out from the children that a noun is a word that labels or 'names' something. Nouns name things, objects, people or places. You can put *a*, *an* or *the* in front of them – *the storm*, *a surprise*, *the fear*, *an umbrella*.

Most nouns can be either singular (only one) or plural (lots of them) – *cloud*, *clouds*.

You can have an adjective before them – *the white clouds*.

A collective noun is a word that refers to a group – *shoal*, *herd*.

Proper nouns begin with capital letters and name people, places, organisations and unique things – *Bob*, *London*, *Macdonalds*. Days of the week and months should also begin with a capital letter – *Tuesday*, *March*.

All other nouns are called common nouns.

Concrete nouns are nouns that name people, places and things that can be experienced through the five senses – *car*, *rain*, *bird*.

Abstract nouns name feelings, ideas and concepts – *hate*, *anger*, *jealousy*. A simple way to explain the difference between concrete and abstract nouns is to say that concrete nouns can be touched, like *concrete* whereas abstract nouns cannot be touched, like *hunger*.

I spy

Play 'I spy'. Make it easy for very young children by suggesting that we only choose things that we can see. Vary this by inviting them to suggest things that you might see in different places, for example, a wildlife park, town centre, shopping mall, park. All the words they choose will be nouns.

Mime it

Someone is selected and comes to the front. This person has to mime something (a noun) and everyone else has one guess. It can help children if you give them categories like animals, things you find in a kitchen, eating something, something you find in the town, something in the countryside, etc.

The 'does it fit?' game

This game is quite a useful way of helping children get a feel for the grammatical properties of a noun. Provide the children with these two sentences:

The x is great.

The x were great.

Then provide a bag of words and the children have to try and work out which can be nouns, which are not, and which can be used as a noun and something else. A basic test to see if something is a noun is to see if it will fit into either of the above sentences. Let us take the word 'green', which at first glance might appear to be an adjective. However:

The green is great.

This works as a sentence. This means that *green*, which is often used as an adjective, can also be used as a noun when it refers to the village green or a golf course or a colour itself. Here are some other words to test out:

fish, group, huge, stole, cars, question, branch, Susie (careful with this one as you need to drop the – 'Susie is great'), party, angry, hard, sun, laptop, potato, stars, shirt, shy, scissors, following, missing, bird, wave.

Text marking

Begin using the term *noun* when discussing reading and writing – use a colour to underline the nouns in a text and then another colour for the adjectives and another for the verbs. The basic tests for a noun are – can you have lots of them (singular/plural), can you put *a/an* or *the* in front of

the word? Give children sentences or paragraphs so they can be ‘noun hunters’. Can they find the nouns?

Labelling

Everyone loves a Post-it note – and you can buy them in all sorts of colours, shapes and sizes. Play a simple labelling game, where Post-its are put on objects in the classroom and arrows are used to label objects in an image. The words are all called *nouns*. Nouns tell you the name of something.

Provide the children with a list of words on a board and get them to decide which are ‘Post-it’ words (*nouns*) and which are ones that tell us what something does (*verbs*):

*cat, cup, jump, car, run, cow, walk, cap, tortoise, candle,
hop, book, pencil, cheese, policeman, swim, guitar, computer*

This is where grammar becomes tricky because you can never really tell what a word is until it is placed within a sentence. Most of us would say, at first glance, that *run, jump, walk* and *hop* are verbs. However, they can also be nouns – cricketers make a run; athletes might make a jump; most weekends we go for a walk; beer is made from hops!

I used a variation of the simple Post-it game with a Year 7 class several years ago. We wrote imaginative questions for the chosen objects and placed them around the room, leaving them there for future classes to look at and wonder:

*Crack in the ceiling – are you a hiding place for spiders?
Light bulb – do you ever get tired of staring down at our whirring
brains?
Dictionary – you have all the words but do you have any sense?
Door – you seem to be silent but do you really think that we have not
heard your squealing?*

Memory game

Everyone of a certain age remembers Bruce Forsyth helping winners in ‘The Generation Game’ trying to remember the items from the conveyor belt. Try your own version – playing the same memory game (known as ‘Kim’s game’). Place objects on a tray in front of children or use a collection of images on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). Give the class time to try and memorise the objects and then cover the tray or blank the screen. On their own, or in pairs, they can try and list the items on a whiteboard, draw them or just remember by memory.

Vary the game. For instance, you might select objects that are all one colour (red = adjective, a word that ‘tells us what something is like’) or for younger children use objects that all start with the same sound/letter.

Alphabet races

These races practise the alphabet and encourage children to generate ideas as well as reinforcing the nature of a noun. Create a simple grid for the children with the alphabet down the left-hand side. The children then have 5–10 minutes to complete as much as possible. The easiest categories are ‘girls’ names’ and ‘boys’ names’. Another fairly easy one is to list fruit and vegetables or food. You could also try other categories such as ‘things you can see in the room’, ‘things you can see in the countryside’, ‘things you can see in the town’. If you are engaged in a topic, then see if they can produce an alphabet of related words perhaps with glossary definitions.

Alphabet	Girl’s name	Boy’s name	Fruit and veg
<i>A</i>	<i>Alice</i>	<i>Ali</i>	<i>avocado</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Beyoncé</i>	<i>Bill</i>	<i>banana</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Carly</i>	<i>Clive</i>	<i>cucumber</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Danni</i>	<i>Duane</i>	<i>dates</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Elif</i>	<i>Eddy</i>	<i>endive</i>

Leave them out (cloze games)

Nouns are crucial labelling devices – without them sentences collapse. Find a few sentences (magpie them from a book) or a paragraph and omit the nouns, creating a simple cloze procedure. Get the children to read the cloze procedure aloud so they can ‘hear’ how the keystones of a sentence are missing – the things/nouns.

Cloze procedure

The ... wheezed past the old. ... The ... tooted the ... and waited while the ... chugged along. Was it about to explode? After a while, a young ... came out and poured cold ... into the Everyone watched while it bubbled happily. ... hissed.

One possible answer

The car wheezed past the old garage. The driver tooted the horn and waited while the engine chugged along. Was it about to explode? After a while, a young man came out and poured cold water into the engine. Everyone watched while it bubbled happily. Steam hissed.

Ask the children to fill the gaps. Then ask them to explain what 'sort' of word was missing. What is the 'job' of that type of word?

Replace with fruit and veg (cloze games)

Another version of cloze procedure involves taking out all the nouns and replacing them with a different word. This can produce much hilarity but is useful because it helps the children to revisit and deepen their 'feel' for the nature of the noble and humble noun – without which we do not know our surroundings. Try replacing nouns with fruit, vegetables or animals. Once again, begin by getting children to read aloud the text as this helps to draw their attention to the nouns that sound odd.

Cloze procedure version

As the banana chugged through the beans, she stared out of the cucumber. Tiny strawberries clung to the tomatoes and, in the melon, lemons grazed. A potato ran beside the lettuce, gurgling on its way to the radish. As she looked out of the cucumber, she noticed the dark pineapple drifting overhead.

One possible answer

As the train chugged through the valleys, she stared out of the window. Tiny houses clung to the hillsides and, in the distance, sheep grazed. A river ran beside the train, gurgling on its way to the sea. As she looked out of the window, she noticed the dark clouds drifting overhead.

Get children to prepare their own paragraphs using fruit or vegetables instead of nouns. They then swap their prepared paragraph with a partner.

Swapping

Another amusing game that focuses on nouns involves swapping them over in a text. You could do this yourself and provide the children with a paragraph or list of sentences with the nouns swapped and they have to sort it out. Once again, reading the text aloud is crucial. You may have noticed that if you are writing and a sentence doesn't seem 'quite right', you find yourself automatically reading aloud to 'hear' whether or not what you have written 'works' – grammar is not just knowing the function of the words in sentences but it is also about usage.

The original	Swapped over text
<i>Bees are famous for making honey. They live in hives and spend most of their time in the summer flying round looking for flowers that contain pollen.</i>	<i>Hives are famous for making bees. They live in honey and spend most of their pollen in the flowers flying round looking for summer that contain time.</i>

'Dead common' or 'Nice and proper'?

Present children with the list of words below. Can they sort the words into two groups and say what the difference might be? Don't prompt the children at all – see if they can notice the difference – and then explain the rule.

dog, Richard, cow, Leeds, cat, chair, December, frost, egg, Wednesday, donut, dust, Thames, sand, Folkestone, flea, Asda

What sorts of words in sentences have a capital letter and why? The key ones are months, days of the week, names of people, organisations and places.

In addition, capital letters are used to start the first word in a sentence and for the word 'I'.

The proper noun alphabet race

Hold an alphabet race in pairs – giving a common and a proper noun for each letter, as well as using alliteration:

A is for Archie, an amiable ant.

B is for Boris, a beautiful bear.

One way to play the game is for partner a to say the first part (*A is for Archie*) and partner b to add on the animal plus adjective (*an amiable ant*). Which pair reaches the end of the alphabet first?

The proper noun poem

Provide the class with a simple pattern that involves a day of the week, a month, a name and a place. Give a few minutes for them to create a simple 'day of the week' list poem. In pairs, let the children 'police' each other's sentences, checking for correct use of capital letters ... and of course full stops, for example:

On Monday in December, Ayse swam seriously to Swindon.

On Tuesday in January, Nick trotted timidly through Grantham.

On Wednesday in February, Tina tiptoed tenaciously by the Thames.

Name it

One of the key things that children need to consider about nouns is the impact they make on the reader. Show the children these two sentences and ask them which one creates a stronger picture and why.

The man came into the building with the dog.

The policeman came into the school with the poodle.

In the second sentence, the nouns are more precise so that the reader can build a stronger picture. Now compare these two sentences and discuss the impact on the reader:

The policeman came into the school with the poodle.

The policeman came into the school with the Rottweiler.

What sort of picture and what effect are created? To me, the idea of a policeman with a poodle sounds silly. However, the Rottweiler sounds like serious business.

Choosing nouns with care can help to build a picture for the reader. Now ask the children to consider the following. If you are writing about a character who is swimming and meets a fish, what do the following words suggest? What mood is created? What might the reader think?

He could just make out a cod swimming towards him.

He could just make out a shark swimming towards him.

He could just make out a sardine swimming towards him.