

## Ideas Everywhere by Polly Dunbar - Expanded Notes

One of the most common questions I get asked as an author is ‘Where do ideas come from?’ and ‘How do you write a story?’ In Ideas Everywhere I set out to write a story about how to write a story. Quite a challenge! It is based on the idea that scraps of paper can become ideas and then stories. I have used this method in classrooms, the children have very quickly come up with brilliantly inventive, daft and yet rounded stories. Here’s how...



### Ideas

The first thing you need for writing a story is an idea. To inspire these illusive creatures, a starting point is very helpful. I have my ‘Magic Ideas Bag’, which is full of these scraps of paper. They are all different shapes, colours, patterns and sizes. Each child chooses a magic scrap and sticks it to a sheet of blank paper. The white page immediately looks a little less scary.



### Character

The next stage is to look very carefully at your scrap, what does the colour shape and texture suggest? What could it be: a person, an animal, a made up creature or even an object made animate? Once you have your character, you need to get to know it, he or she. Perhaps give it a name? Decide what it likes and dislikes. What would it carry around in a pocket or bag?

You can decide whether your character is a goodie or a baddie (or in my case a good egg or a bad egg?) make your characters extraordinarily interesting or extraordinarily dull; above all have fun and be inventive.



## **Emotion**

Now for the nitty-gritty; how does your character feel? What kind of mood are they in and why? Emotion is a key part to story telling. As soon as you start asking these questions you will get to know your character on a much deeper level; readers will relate to your character. Now you are ready to begin the story journey...



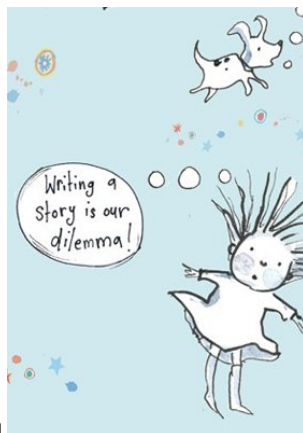
## **The Beginning**

One of the first rules we learn about storytelling is to include a beginning, middle and an end. I have incorporated this structure into Ideas Everywhere, but you don't necessarily have to start at the beginning, you might find your idea or inspiration lands you in the middle of a story or even at the end; then you can work sideways or backwards to find your way out. For the sake of simplicity, I have started at the beginning!



## Location

Not all stories need a location, many of mine are set against a white background, this allows me to concentrate on the emotion of the characters, and gives more space for the imagination. Having said that, it can be helpful to decide where your story is taking place. It's better to think of places in general, rather than specific countries or towns. A place that your readers can be transported to: a park, a pond or an imaginary world? Literally wherever your imagination takes you!



## Dilemma

Okay, so you have a character in a setting, now for a very important bit- something has to happen! You need to give your character a dilemma or a problem; something they need to overcome or resolve; something that will make your story exciting. Think about problems you have experienced, they can be the big action packed ones, like my example of being tossed about at sea, or the smaller ones like not being able to tie your shoe laces. You will find your life is full of little problems, no worries.. it's all good story fodder! In Ideas Everywhere a few dilemmas emerged. The first problem is- how do you write a story? The second is that the main character is lonely. The third is how to get them out of the water and onto dry land.



## Conflict

Stories are not about nice people doing nice things all of the time- that would be dull. Dilemmas can often lead to conflict, which can be exciting. It could be inner conflict, a character trying to make a decision, or a misunderstanding with another character. Perhaps grab another scrap of paper and invent a new character at this point; someone/something for your original character to conflict with or relate to.



## The Middle

The turning point in a story is important, it is the part that will give your story shape and make it more interesting; a story that is simply linear is not really a story. You can see an example of this in my [game of consequences](#) (lovely as it is). A turning point can exist in a number of ways, it could be that eureka moment; a time to present your character with the unexpected (a surprise is always good), it could be the moment where you begin to resolve your dilemma.



## Resolution

So now you will hopefully have a couple of characters in a spot of bother; it is your job as the writer to save the day! You may know the resolution to your story before you have even started to write, or it may take you completely by surprise. My Mum, Joyce Dunbar wrote half of our book *Shoe Baby* and got stuck, it was not until six years later that she discovered the resolution and was able to finish the story. It's not as easy as saying 'and they all lived happily ever after.' Tempting as that may be.



## The End

When I'm writing a story I always like to have the end clearly in sight, it literally is an island to swim towards. If you know it's there, you know which direction to swim in! Endings don't have to be happy but a satisfying ending is worth aiming for. If it has a twist in the tale, even better!



## **Imagination**

There are many rules you can follow to help you write, but the most important bit is using your unique imagination. The structure and advice I have given is worth nothing without sprinkling it with your own invention and creativity. Hopefully this guide will help you with this and at the same time rein your ideas in, stopping your story from spiralling out of control.

You will only really know if your story lives and breathes until it is written. There is no magic structure or formula for bringing a story to life. Well if there is, I haven't found it...yet. Happy writing!