

MO O'HARA: Author of 'My Big Fat Zombie Goldfish':

Mo O'Hara grew up in Pennsylvania, USA, but now lives in south-east London. She began her writing and acting career by touring theatres and schools all across the UK and Ireland, working as a storyteller. As well as writing books for children Mo has written comedy sketches for Radio 4 and has performed her own material in London and Edinburgh. Mo and her big brother once brought their own pet goldfish back from the brink of death.



What I can do for a school visit?

I can do a whole school assembly which can be from 45 minutes to an hour long and is very interactive. I read a bit from the My Big Fat Zombie Goldfish books and talk about the process of taking a book from idea to actual published copy. Then I do a bit of stand up about the incident in my childhood that inspired the book and that leads into a mass brainstorming session about idea sparking for books. The kids get to share ideas, dress up as characters from the books and it all ends in a Zombie Fish Face Off. Lots of evil scientist Mwheaaa haaa haaa laughing all around but also some great story sparking and some insight into the way a book is written.

or

I can do a creative workshop in year groups or in class groups that would probably be 50 minutes with the Yr 3 and 4 children and 60 minutes with the Yr 5 and Yr 6. In this creative writing session we make a story map that starts with creating a strong central character and spins out a story out from there. We work on methods for creating a story and then map out that story taking in the key points of Character, Plot and Setting. By the end of the session the kids will have a story map with sections of their story written and planned. There is plenty of opportunity for verbal input as well as drawing and writing.

or

I can do a whole hour long workshop called The Spark which explores how ideas are turned into stories. We explore three very different methods of story generating that use visual, auditory and kinaesthetic means for sparking a story idea. We use games, sensory stimulus and free writing to get the kids to use all their senses and to ask the questions that make an ordinary story idea extraordinary. This is a very interactive session that would give the children lots of opportunities for sharing ideas and for getting those ideas down on paper.

or

I also do a Drama in Writing workshop that explores the connections between acting, directing and writing. This workshop is very much an on your feet experience that combines my experience of acting and writing. (Ideally we would need a hall space for this workshop but it could work for all year groups and could be done in groups up to about 50) The kids would not pick up a piece of paper in this workshop. Instead they would explore the creation of character and emotions on the page by acting and demonstrating those emotions. One of the most common notes given to new writers is, 'Show, don't tell.' This is also one of the most common notes given by directors to new actors. We explore, through drama exercises, how to show emotion through action and how to convey intent through dialogue. We also touch on the concept of muscular memory, which is a technique that actors use to recreate certain moments again and again on stage. We show how this is useful in plotting and planning the actions of your characters, when you are, in effect, directing them in a scene. Lastly we look at the concept of 'hot-seating' your characters to get to know them as an actor would when they approach a role. This is incredibly useful in making characters seem three dimensional in your book.

I am happy to do any of these workshops or a combination thereof with the different year groups. It really depends what else they will be doing in the other sessions so they won't be covering the same ground.

The drama one works great if they've done a lot of writing and need some free movement and thinking time. It's a great energy boost too.

The assembly works well as a kick off to the day or as a fun wrap up in the afternoon. The other creative writing workshops can be tailored to meet the needs of the individual year groups that will be participating.