



A Writing Root for Weirdo by Zadie Smith and Nick Laird



Literary Theme: Strength of mind **Alternative Literary Theme:** Perfect fit (R/1)

Recommended Age: Reception, Summer term 1

Text(s): Weirdo by Zadie Smith and Nick Laird

Duration: 2+ weeks, 10+ sessions

Outcomes: Posters, notes, badges, letters, writing in role, leaflets
Main outcome: Instructional leaflet on being yourself and accepting others

Overview and outcomes: In this ten session Writing Root, which we suggest will take 3 weeks to cover, the children arrive to class to find that the role-play area has been set up as The Be Yourself Boutique. They think about what it means to be yourself before sharing the story where they meet a character who is perceived as being weird. In fact, the other pets in the house call her, 'Weirdo'. The children write infer feelings and talk about not just being yourself but also accepting and celebrating others' individuality. Finally, they explore ways of helping others to be themselves before helping Maud (the name The Surprise is eventually given) to write a guide on being yourself and accepting others. Phonics teaching is embedded throughout and suggestions for Continuous Provision are also made.

Coverage from September 2021 Statutory EYFS Framework

The statements below are not 'single-lesson' objectives, but statements intended to be covered by the end of the EYFS. They will often be met in part and returned to across the year and some will be covered implicitly through the teaching of other objectives, tasks, activities or continuous provision. The level of development children should be expected to have attained by the end of the EYFS is defined by the early learning goals (ELGs) as set out below.

Note about the use of this Writing Root:

The numbers in each section denote the 'step' in the sequence you need to take. This does not necessarily mean that you do one step per day; sometimes you'll need several days for each step so that all children have had the opportunity to fully access what is offered as a focus-group or independently accessed activity.

Prime Area: Communication and Language

ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions;
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding;
- Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

ELG: Speaking

- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary;
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate;
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

Specific Area: Literacy

ELG: Comprehension

- Demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories and narratives using their own words and recently introduced vocabulary;
- Anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories;
- Use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems and during role-play.

ELG: Word Reading

- Say a sound for each letter in the alphabet and at least 10 digraphs;
- Read words consistent with their phonic knowledge by sound-blending;
- Read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words.

ELG: Writing

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed;
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters;
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.



Specific Area: Understanding the World

ELG: Past and Present

- Talk about the lives of the people around them and their roles in society;
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class;
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

ELG: People, Culture and Communities

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps;
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class;
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and – when appropriate – maps.

ELG: The Natural World

- Explore the natural world around them, making observations and drawing pictures of animals and plants;
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class;
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

Specific Area: Expressive Arts and Design

ELG: Creating with Materials

- Safely use and explore a variety of materials, tools and techniques, experimenting with colour, design, texture, form and function;
- Share their creations, explaining the process they have used;
- Make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.

ELG: Being Imaginative and Expressive

- Invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher;
- Sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs;
- Perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and – when appropriate – try to move in time with music.


N.B In line with the recommendations within the framework this document should not be prescriptive and 'planning and guiding what children learn, practitioners must reflect on the different rates at which children are developing and adjust their practice appropriately. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'
- **active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- **creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things'






Learning Objective	Success Criteria	Teacher Input (this may be to the whole class or to a smaller group of children)	Resources	Teacher led focus group or Independent Application	Continuous Provision
1) To participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary	<p>I can share ideas in a small group</p> <p>I can use new words</p>	<p>Have role-play area set up as <insert class name>'s <i>Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p> <p>Have positive affirmations on posters, sticky notes in different shapes for children to write affirmations on, stickers to reward individuality and kindness and as many texts that you can find that celebrate individuality.</p> <p><i>What does it mean to be an individual?</i> Talk about the things that children enjoy that others may not. Ask, <i>can we be friends with someone who likes different things to us?</i></p>	<p>Posters, sticky notes in different shapes, stickers</p> <p>index cards with pre-stuck photos of the children</p>	<p>Work with groups of children to talk about things they think make them individual. It could simply be things that they like but they might also want to think about things that could be seen as unusual such as, I don't like chocolate!</p> <p>Oral rehearsal of ideas, encouraging complete sentences (statements.)</p> <p>Index of individuality: Tell the children that an index is a list and is often featured in a non-fiction text to identify the pages on which key ideas might be found et cetera. Look in some information texts and find and talk about the index page. Support the children to record things that make them, them! Provide index cards for the children to write these on and if possible, have a photo of each child glued to their index card and let them write down the thing that they feel makes them an individual.</p>	<p>In role-play area, children can create further affirmative signage and it would be nice also to have little 'take-away' cards so that children can 'carry' positive and empowering thoughts with them.</p> <p>Also have notelets for penning short letters of advice to others.</p>
2) To write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others	<p>I can write command sentences</p>	<p>Let the children arrive to class to find, in <i>The Be Yourself Boutique</i>, a small box with holes along the side and with shredded paper inside, poking out a little. Label the parcel with 'Kit' written on a gift-tag and have some ribbons around the packaging. If possible, have balloons too so that the scene you have set up in the role-play area emulates the illustration in the book, <i>Weirdo</i> by Zadie Smith and Nick Laird. Have a wrapped copy of the text and read the blurb: this tells the children the key points of the plot and that Maud is the name that is eventually given to the main character. Reading this first is useful as it will help orientate the children and support comprehension.</p> <p>Share the text up to, <i>If you're not a cat or a dog or a bird, you're a weirdo</i>. Elicit that the other pets are making The Surprise feel uncomfortable but also that because the guinea pig says 'judo' so quietly it sounds like the word, weirdo, this is where the misunderstanding originates. Ask, <i>do you think that the other pets are being kind, though?</i></p>	<p>Copy of the story, gift-wrapped and labelled, 'Kit'; box with visible shredded paper and label as in the text</p> <p>Copy of the book, gift-wrapped too</p> <p>If possible, balloons</p> <p>Notelets matching what's been left out in the <i>Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p>	<p>Commands of kindness: Teacher in role as either the cat, dog or bird from the text. Children to give the character advice about being kind and accepting someone who appears 'different'. Orally model a command sentence: Ask them about their hobbies. Show them around.</p> <p>In pairs, children role-play one person being one of the pets and the other giving advice about being kind and accepting. Now, support the children to record what they say in their pair by writing a short note to give to either the cat, dog or bird. Provide the children with a selection of imperative verbs written as sentence openers to support the grammar of commands: Ask... Show... Tell... Smile... Some children may need you to scribe this for them.</p>	<p>Children can extend their role-play to the role-play area by giving 'pets' (cuddly toys) advice about being the new person or welcoming a new person. Use the cards to do this.</p> <p>One child can be in role as a coach to give advice to others, either on being more confident or kinder, who visit <i>The Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p>

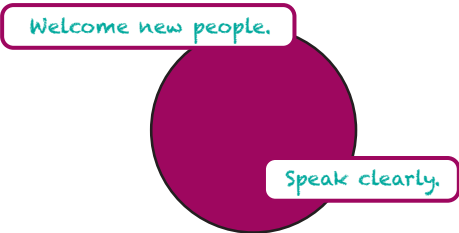


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<p>3) To anticipate – where appropriate – key events in stories</p> <p>To spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters</p> <p>To write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.</p>	<p>I can talk about what I think might happen next in a story</p> <p>I can use sounds to spell</p> <p>I can write sentences</p>	<p>Continue to share the text <i>Weirdo</i> by Zadie Smith and Nick Laird. Today, re-read from the beginning and then further than you read in session 2, pausing to ensure that the children know a 'schedule' is a timetable and that the animals seem to watch TV a lot and not much else! Stop after, <i>Then she had an idea. What might that idea be?</i> Look back at the page where it says, <i>she thought about ways to make herself more like the others.</i> Display an enlarged copy of this page so that the children can look closely at Maud's facial expressions in each of the three pictures. Has dyeing her hair blue to be like Dora the cat made her happy? How about wearing glasses exactly like Bob the pug? Or crafting wings to look like Derrick the bird? Talk about this and about how it's important to be yourself and like who you are as this is how you can be happiest rather than comparing yourself to others.</p>	<p>Badge-making materials</p>	<p>Be yourself badges: Working with a focus group, have badge-making materials and a word-bank of high frequency and common exception words: <i>I, am, to, you, and, be, was, my, me</i></p> <p>Let the children talk about things that we can say to ourselves or others when we're maybe feeling a bit worried that we don't fit in:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p>Add a layer to role-play area where children can create further badges for the pets that have been visiting <i>The Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p>
<p>4) To read aloud simple sentences and books that are consistent with their phonic knowledge, including some common exception words</p> <p>To write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.</p>	<p>I can use phonics to help me read</p> <p>I can write sentences</p>	<p>Read on in the text from the 'Surprise!' page where Maud floats up and then out the window to the end of the wordless page in which Kit can be seen scooting home in the last picture. There are lots of ideas and themes in these few pages so set aside time to talk about the children's interpretation, focusing on all of the things that Emily Brookstein does to show kindness and acceptance.</p> <p>Acts of acceptance: Place the cards in the middle of a circle (this could be done with the whole-class or in a smaller group). Invite children to take turns in selecting one card at a time and shared-read before finding in the text how Emily did each thing/where it says what she did: <i>Emily made Maud feel welcome.</i> <i>Emily gave Maud macaroons to eat.</i></p>	<p>Acts of acceptance cards</p> <p>Letter paper and envelopes.</p>	<p>In role as The Surprise, write a letter of thanks to Emily Brookstein. Model first:</p> <p><i>Dear Emily, Thank you for making me feel welcome and teaching me that it's okay to be myself. We are all different and being a bit weird just means that I am an individual. Love from your friend, The Surprise x</i></p> <p>(Let the children sign-off as The Surprise as it's kinder than the name 'Weirdo' that the others have given the character and also Maud doesn't know at this stage that Kit will name her so.)</p>	<p>Children can send the letter by balloon post*, which is how Maud ended up floating towards Emily's flat.</p> <p>*Attach envelopes to balloons and display/hang somewhere but please don't be tempted to send off on helium balloons as this is harmful to the environment.</p>




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5) To offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate	I can talk about how a character felt	<p>Continue to read in the story, stopping at <i>I am a weirdo, she said, but I am also a Maud</i>. How does it feel when we are hugged? Share some vocabulary (children and you) such as loved, warm, safe, happy. Write the children's ideas and ideas you have on to strips of card to create a word-bank about what the children think Maud would've felt when Kit hugged her.</p> <p>Thought-tapping: Model speaking in role as Maud, talking about being hugged by Kit:</p> <p><i>I felt warm and safe when Maud hugged me.</i></p>	Blank strips of card	<p>Children to write in role as Maud and focus on the first person as this is what the children will need to use when writing the guide to being yourself at the end of this planning sequence:</p> 	Continue to support play in the <i>Be Yourself Boutique</i> , offering advice to pets who either feel different or who are struggling to be kind with new pets. Set up scenarios and where possible, guide other adults in the setting to support play, using new vocabulary and reenacting new ideas as they are met when reading.
6) To spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters	I can use sounds to spell	<p>Read from <i>Sorry about earlier, said Derrick</i>. to the end. Remind the children that one way of making somebody feel accepted is to ask them about themselves and involve them in what is going on. The pets have said sorry to Maud, which is the right thing to do and Maud is now being accepted for herself: she has even been training the pets in judo, which has been added to the daily schedule!</p> <p>Do any of the children do judo/have siblings who go to judo? Tell the children that it is a martial art. You might want to show them a video clip of a judo demonstration.</p> <p>Look at the double page that has no words but which shows Maud teaching judo.</p> <p>What sort of sounds might have been made by Maud and the others? Say the vowel sounds /ar/ /er/ /ur/ /or/.</p>	Resource to support encoding (could be phoneme frames or something else from your phonics programme)	<p>Shared reading: Read the following verbs: <i>hurl, curl, fling, twirl, throw, drop</i>. Tell the children that these are all verbs – doing or being words – that could be used to describe what Maud enjoys doing and what she's teaching the others.</p> <p>Provide children with some phoneme frames or another suitable/preferred resource and dictate the above verbs so that the children can write them onto the phoneme frames. remind them to segment each word and that any digraphs* need to go in one box. Model first:</p>  <p>*always be guided by the phonics programme used in your school where graphemes may be taught differently</p>	



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<p>7) To use and understand recently introduced vocabulary during discussions about stories</p> <p>To demonstrate understanding of what has been read to them by retelling stories</p>	<p>I can talk about what's happened in a story</p> <p>I can retell a story</p>	<p><i>How did Maud feel when she first arrived? What about when Kit hugged her and introduced her to the others? Why do you think the other pets treated Maud unkindly? Do you think they'd ever met a guinea pig who was good at judo? Illicit that sometimes people can be afraid of the unknown and sometimes they don't like change either.</i></p>	<p>A selection of key illustrations from the text for the children to sequence</p> <p>Puppets for continuous provision</p>	<p>Provide the children with key pictures from the text. First, talk about what's happening in each picture then let them arrange these in the sequence they appear in the story. Ideally, let them use a copy of the text whilst doing this so that they can identify the sequence of events correctly. Then ask the children to retell the story verbally, using their sequence of pictures as a prop.</p> <p>Support more able children to caption each picture OR scribe children's ideas.</p>	<p>Create a puppet for each illustration by printing, cutting, laminating and lolly-sticking each picture and let the children independently role-play Maud and the other pets playing together/working through their daily schedule of TV, judo and being hugged by Kit.</p>
<p>8) To express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including ... making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.</p> <p>To make use of props and materials when role playing characters in narratives and stories.</p>	<p>I can share my ideas in a group</p> <p>I can explain my thinking</p>	<p>Have a letter delivered from Maud in a blue envelope; try to decorate with blue flowers or have a pressed/cut out blue flower inside the letter to represent Maud <i>Who might have sent the children this letter?</i></p> <p>Share the letter with the children:</p> <p><i>Dear children, Thank you for helping the pets who have visited your Be Yourself Boutique and each other to see that being yourself is the very best thing that you can be.</i></p> <p><i>I am going to try to write a leaflet that will help others to be themselves and to accept differences. But I'm not very good at writing. Can you help me please?</i></p> <p><i>Love from Maud the Weirdo</i></p>	<p>Letter from Maud in envelope (enlarged copy attached to back of sequence); try to decorate with blue flowers or have a pressed/cut out blue flower inside the letter to represent Maud</p> <p>On the dot or not resource</p>	<p>On the dot or not: Work with groups of children to use the resource to help organise ideas into those that will help people to be themselves or accept others – place these on the dot -and ideas that are unhelpful.</p> <p>As the children sort the ideas, support discussion around the reasons for choices and why each idea is either helpful or unhelpful. Oral rehearsal of conjunctions: <i>because, as</i> and <i>so</i>.</p> 	<p>Set up the On the dot or not resource, ideally on an easel or board in the Be Yourself Boutique.</p> <p>Have the pets (cuddly toys) that have visited for advice across the sessions as part of role-play attend a Being Yourself class where groups of children can coach the pets (or each other) by reusing the on the dot resource.</p>



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9) To listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions	I can listen to others' idea	<p>Let's help Maud by writing down our ideas about being yourself and accepting others in a leaflet. Look at a selection of real information leaflets: these might be for local attractions or a dentist's guide to looking after your teeth. <i>What do the children notice about how the leaflets have been set out? What else do they notice?</i> Aim to have examples that include commands as this will be helpful in modelling not just layout features but also the grammar that the children should use.</p> <p>Tell the children that their leaflets are going to be displayed in the <i>Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p>	<p>Selection of real information leaflets</p> <p>A3 paper pre-folded into thirds to create leaflets that are ready to be written in</p>	<p>Spend time with the children in small groups supporting them to write headings into their pre-folded leaflets. As this is a non-chronological report, the sequence of information isn't too important so children can plan to include advice in any order they like for their leaflet.</p> <p>Ideas for content: Be kind: Commands of kindness (this derives from session 2) Be Yourself: badges that children made in session 3 Be friendly: how Emily did this (look at ideas from session 4) And any relevant ideas from session 8.</p> <p>Some children may need to create a leaflet in a small group where you scribe.</p>	
10) To invent, adapt and recount narratives and stories with peers and their teacher	I can write a leaflet	<p>Use this time to work with small groups of all the children across the class so that everyone has had the chance to produce their own leaflets. Some children may benefit from continuing to work in a small group with you scribing.</p> <p>Children can draw/write/ have an adult to scribe ideas.</p>			<p>Display leaflets on a rack/pin board in the <i>Be Yourself Boutique</i>.</p> <p>If liked, you could have a final letter from Maud thanking the children for their writing.</p>



Glossary

Working Wall – An ongoing display inside the classroom, where the process of writing is demonstrated through the addition of examples of writing and visuals, to be referenced by both teachers (during the modelling process) and children (during the writing process). This often reflects the different parts of the planning sequence.

On the Dot (or Not) – Children decide which words should be placed on the dot, e.g. sad, forlorn, silly, small, scared etc. that describe a character or setting. As the pictures change, so does the relevance of the vocabulary. Therefore words are placed on the dot or not!

Grammar Splat – Use the text to identify a specific word class, write them on a post-it and stick them to the grammar splat to form a word bank based upon the author's vocabulary choices.

Talking Partners – usually in whole-class teaching, each child has a partner, with whom they feel comfortable and with whom they share ideas, opinions and planning, before feeding back to the class.

Independent Writing – Children write with a greater degree of independence, although they may still use resources such as the working wall, vocabulary prompts or writing scaffolds to support where necessary.

Editing and Improving and Publishing – Use response partners to develop revising and checking. Show examples to the whole class so that children can talk about their writing, e.g. using visualiser. Pupils mark in a colour where they have used a feature and comment on success of writing. Decide how writing will be published.

Teacher-in-Role – Teacher takes on a role from the text.

Writing-in-Role – Whilst in role, teacher models writing as a character from the text.

Shared Writing (may refer to):

Modelled Writing – Demonstrate by explaining aloud, talking as a writer, focusing upon the objective, include: new and difficult aspects of writing; transforming a plan into writing; rehearsing, evaluating, rereading, referring to checklists, scaffolds & models.

Teacher as Scribe – Pupils participate with the teacher as editor and scribe. Keep focus clearly on the learning objective. Encourage pupils to rehearse sentences and reconsider children's suggestions when necessary. Maintain pace.

Supported Writing – Practise trying out words, sentences or paragraphs on whiteboards or sentence strips. Use a range of strategies such as writing partners, working from modelled text, writing frames, sentence prompts etc.



Acts of acceptance

Emily gave Maud macaroons to eat.

Emily helped Maud to be herself.

Emily told Maud that she is a weirdo, too!

Maud and Emily played cards

Emily told Maud about her aunt Melody.

Emily made Maud feel welcome.



Letter of thanks

Dear children,

Thank you for helping the pets who have visited your Be Yourself Boutique and each other to see that being yourself is the very best thing that you can be.

I am going to try to write a leaflet that will help others to be themselves and to accept differences. But I'm not very good at writing. Can you help me please?

Love from
Maud the ~~Weirdo~~



On the dot or not?

Welcome new people.	Speak clearly.	Invite people to play.	Smile kindly.
Ignore new people.	Speak too quietly for people to hear.	Leave people out of games.	Look away.

