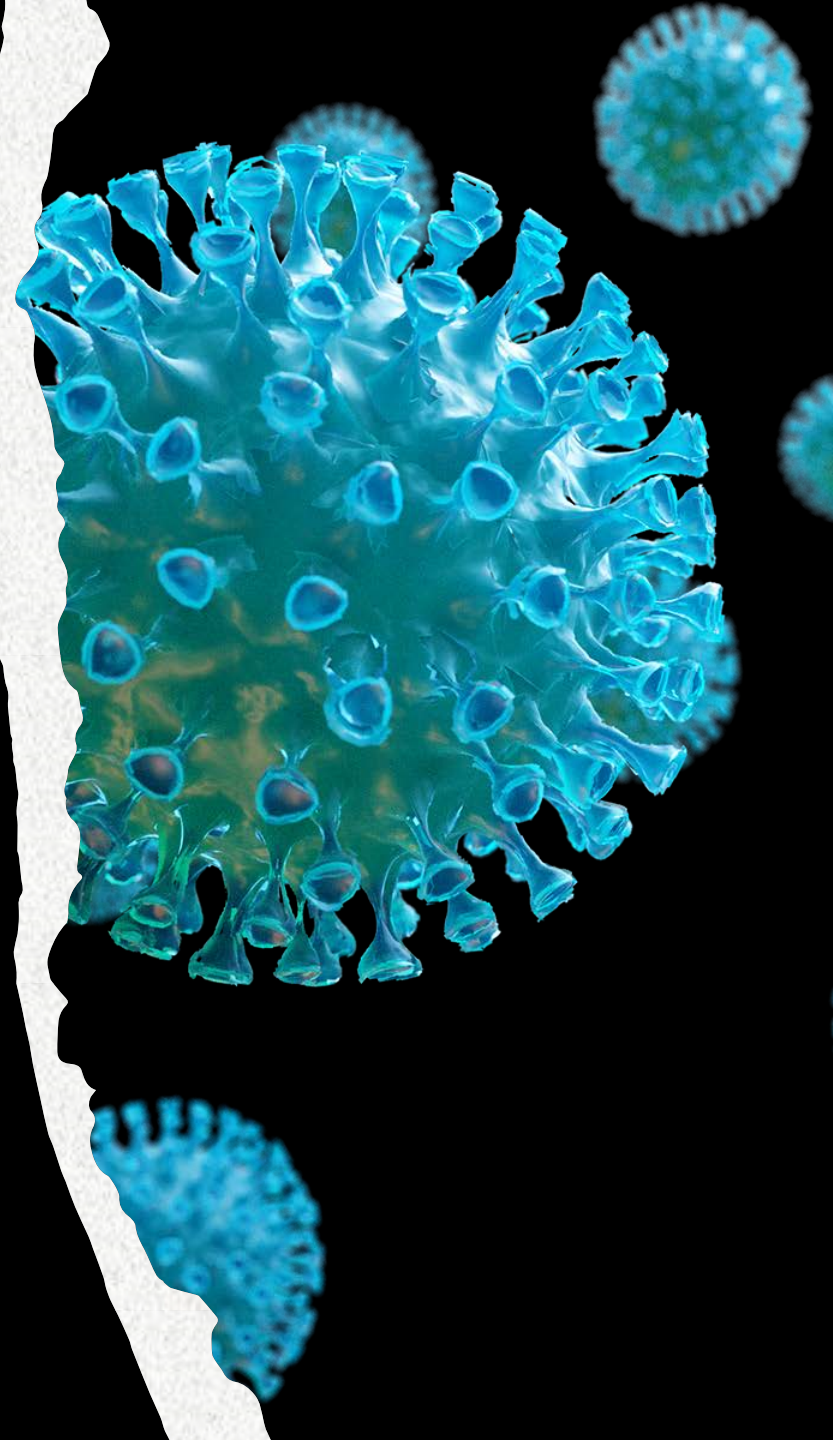




# Linguistics-Informed Reading Materials for Beginning-Level Adult Migrants

7 January 2021

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# Adult migrants with minimal education or literacy in their home language

*Take up to eight times longer than their educated, literate counterparts to reach comparable language and literacy levels*

(Condelli et al., 2003; Filimban 2019; Kurvers et al. 2010; Schellekens, 2011; Tarone et al., 2009; Young-Scholten & Strom 2006; Young-Scholten & Naeb 2010)

## **One solution: pleasure reading/extensive reading**

From Elley & Mangubhai (1983) through PISA, studies show effectiveness and benefits (Bamford & Day 2004; Cardiff et al. 2007; Clarke 2013; Coady 1997; Davis 1995; Dijikic et al. 2009; Duncan 2014; Grabe 2009; Gradman & Hanania 1991; Horst 2000; Hsueh-Chao & Nation 2000; Krashen 1989, 2004; 2007; Laufer et al. 2006; Laymon 2012; Lee 2009; Mar & Oatley 2008; Middlemas 2020; Mori 2002; Neuman & Celano 2001; Rodrigo et al. 2007; Scheldrick-Ross et al. 2005; Sonnenschein et al. 2000; Tse 1996; Williamson 2013; Yamashita 2008)

# Pleasure reading

benefits all ages,  
levels, groups:

## Language

**Reading comprehension, vocabulary for all readers**

**For L2 learners: morphosyntax (provides comprehensible input)**

(Compelling Input hypothesis, Coady 1997; Krashen 2011; Lee 2009; Nation 2001; PISA results; VanPatten & Williams 2007)

## Psychological

**Wellbeing; autonomy; independence; motivation; self-confidence;  
self-development; existential self-information; identity**

(Birkert 1994; Clark & Rumbold 2006; Dijkic et al. 2009; Glenn 2004; Howard 2011; Mar & Oatley 2008; Taylor 1999; Toyne & Usherwood 2003; Twomey 2003; Sanacore 1999; Schraw et al. 1998; Wigfield & Guthrie 1997)

## Social

**Critical literacy for active citizenship**

(Adams 2008; Auerbach & Wallerstein 2005; Cardiff et al. 2007; Cooke & Simpson 2008; Duncan 2014; Friere 1970; Graff 1993; Hamilton & Hillier 2006; Schellekens 2007; Spiegel & Sunderland 2006; Ward 2007)

# Pleasure reading requires

- ✓ A place, space and time to read (Bryan 2011; Hafiz & Tudor 1989)
- ✓ For gist, so no questions or tests (Krashen)
- ✓ Long-term commitment by teachers/programmes (Nation)

## Books that are

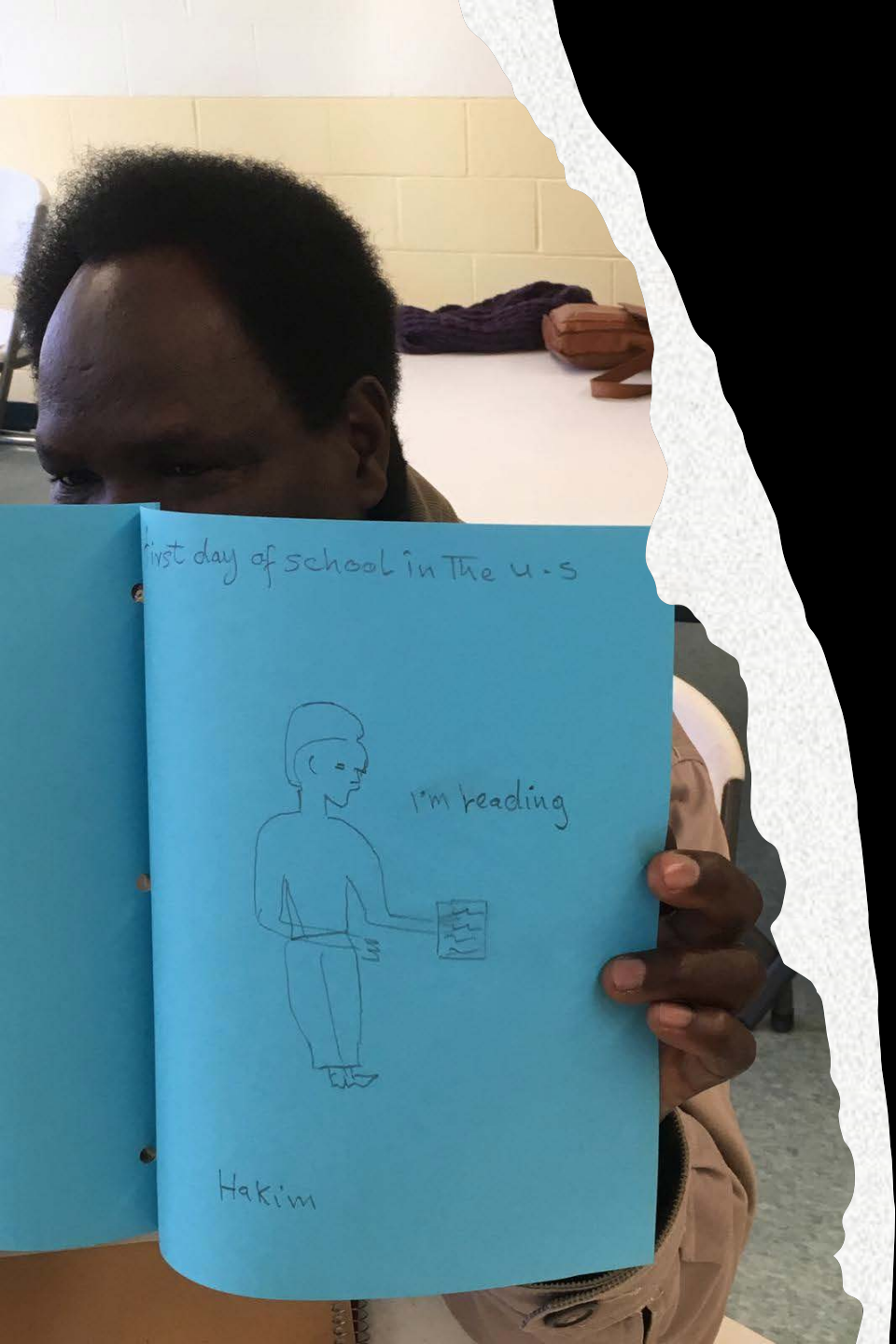
### ➤ At the reader's linguistic level

(Birch 2002; Edinburgh Project on ER/Graded Reader Database, Crossley et al. 2012; Hill 2008)

### ➤ Engaging (and e.g. outside readers' experience; culturally rich

(Anderson et al. 1987; David 2009; Glazer 2000; Jose & Brewer 1984; Keis 2006; Moses 2000; Pang & Kamil 2004; Ryan & Deci 2000; White 2007; Williams 1986)





There are few books at the linguistic level of adult beginners with limited literacy.



*Simply Stories* since 2010 books produced through collaboration by linguists, creative writers and artists (Wilkinson & Young-Scholten 2011; see [www.simplystories.org](http://www.simplystories.org))

### Engaging narratives

*Only fiction provides the type of text that can develop a learner's fluency. [...] The advantages of fiction are that the context is universal, and a combination of narrative and dialog much easier to read than expository prose. (Hill 2008:186-187)*

### Linguistic accessibility

*Shakespeare wrote for a stage where there were no flashbacks, no voice-overs [...] little scenery [...] and yet with all these restrictions created masterpieces.*

*The second language writer is also working with severe limitations, but within these limitations it should also be possible to create small masterpieces. We need to see more of these masterpieces. (Nation 2001:173).*



# Criteria for a Simply Cracking Good Story

## The narrative should meet these criteria

- Complex and sympathetic characters
- Use of writing in scenes to recruit the senses and show not tell
- Information left unstated where the reader must infer and interpret
- Status quo disrupted by high-stakes, non-trivial obstacles or desires
- Suspense: surprises, twists, cliff hangers

## The language should be basic

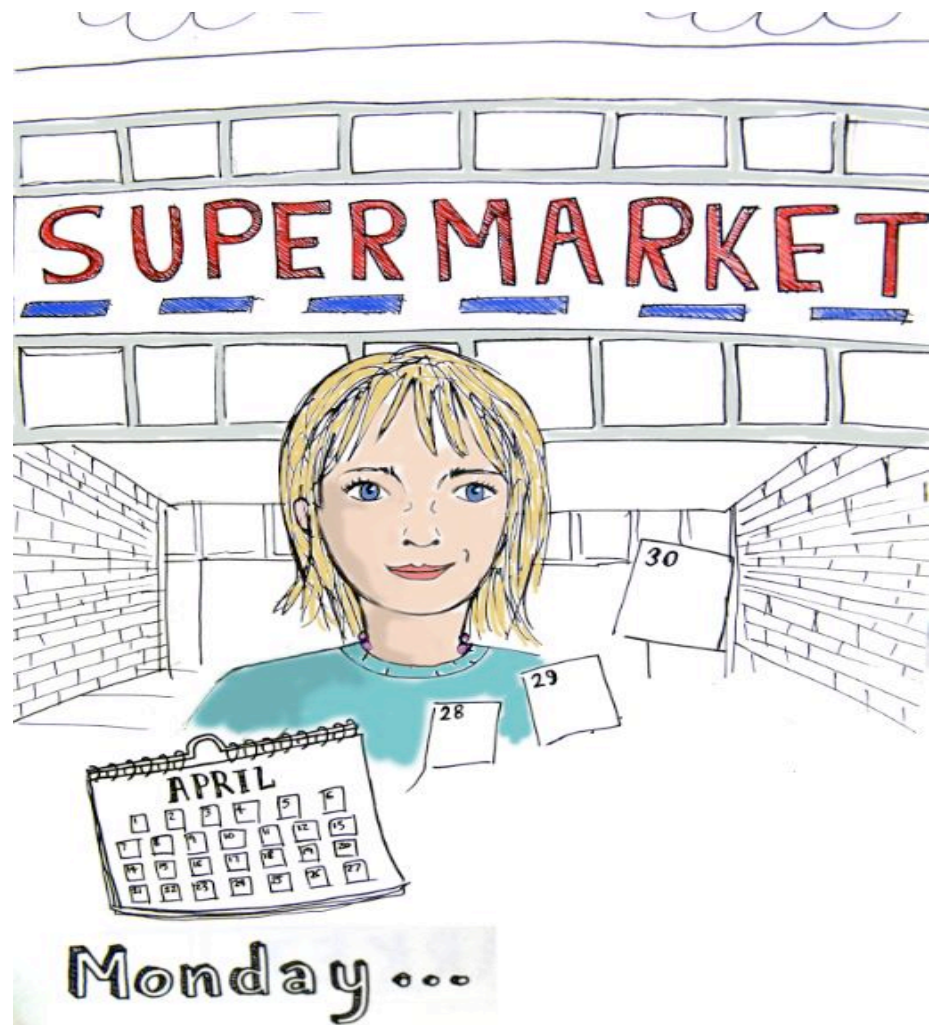
- Single-clause subject-verb-object sentences with little functional morphology (following stages of Organic Grammar, Vainikka & Young-Scholten 2011; Vainikka et al. 2017)
- Single-syllable or two-syllable words with few consonant clusters
- Words with regular spelling and common sight words if irregular
- Relevant and concrete verbs and nouns: 98% known (Hseuh-Chau & Nation 2000, repetition (Nation 2001); use in different contexts (Smyser 2016); multi-modal (O'Bryan 2005; Al Seghayer 2001)

Stage	word order	verb types	agreement/tense	pronouns	syntax
<b>VP</b>	L1 order, then L2 order	thematic (main) verbs	none	no subject, object pronouns absent	none
<b>Negation Phrase</b>	resembles the L1 apart from complex syntax	thematic verbs; copula 'is'	none	pronoun forms begin to emerge	negation; single clauses; formulaic or intonation-based questions
<b>Aspect Phrase</b>	resembles the L1 apart from complex syntax	-ing	none	pronoun forms begin to emerge	negation; single clauses; formulaic or intonation-based questions
<b>Tense Phrase</b>	resembles the L2 apart from complex syntax	thematic verbs, modals; copular forms beyond 'is'	no agreement; some tense, some aspect, but not productive	more pronoun forms, but they can still be missing	conjoined clauses; formulaic wh-Qs; yes/no Qs without inversion
<b>Agreement Phrase</b>	resembles the L2 apart from complex syntax	thematic verbs, modals, copular forms beyond 'is'; auxiliaries in all forms and tenses	productive tense, aspect; some agreement, especially forms of 'be'	pronouns obligatory, 'there' and existential 'it'	simple subordination; wh-Qs but all Qs may lack inversion
<b>Complementizer Phrase</b>	always resembles the L2	complex tense, aspect forms; range of thematic verb, modal, auxiliary forms	forms usually correct, apart from newly attempted ones	use of 'there' and 'it' beyond stock phrases	complex subordination; all Qs with inversion



An example of a Simply Story, written by students on an acquisition module/course

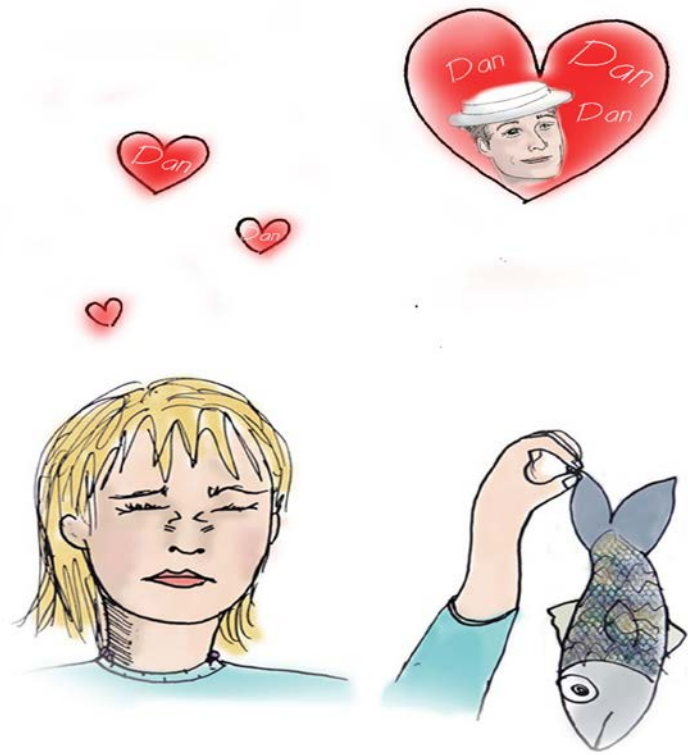




Emma goes to the supermarket every day.



Dan works at the  
supermarket.  
Dan sells fish.



Emma hates Fish.  
Emma likes Dan.



Emma has a fat cat.



Today Dan smiles  
at Emma.  
Emma's face goes  
red.

Tuesday ...



Emma misses Dan.

Wednesday ...



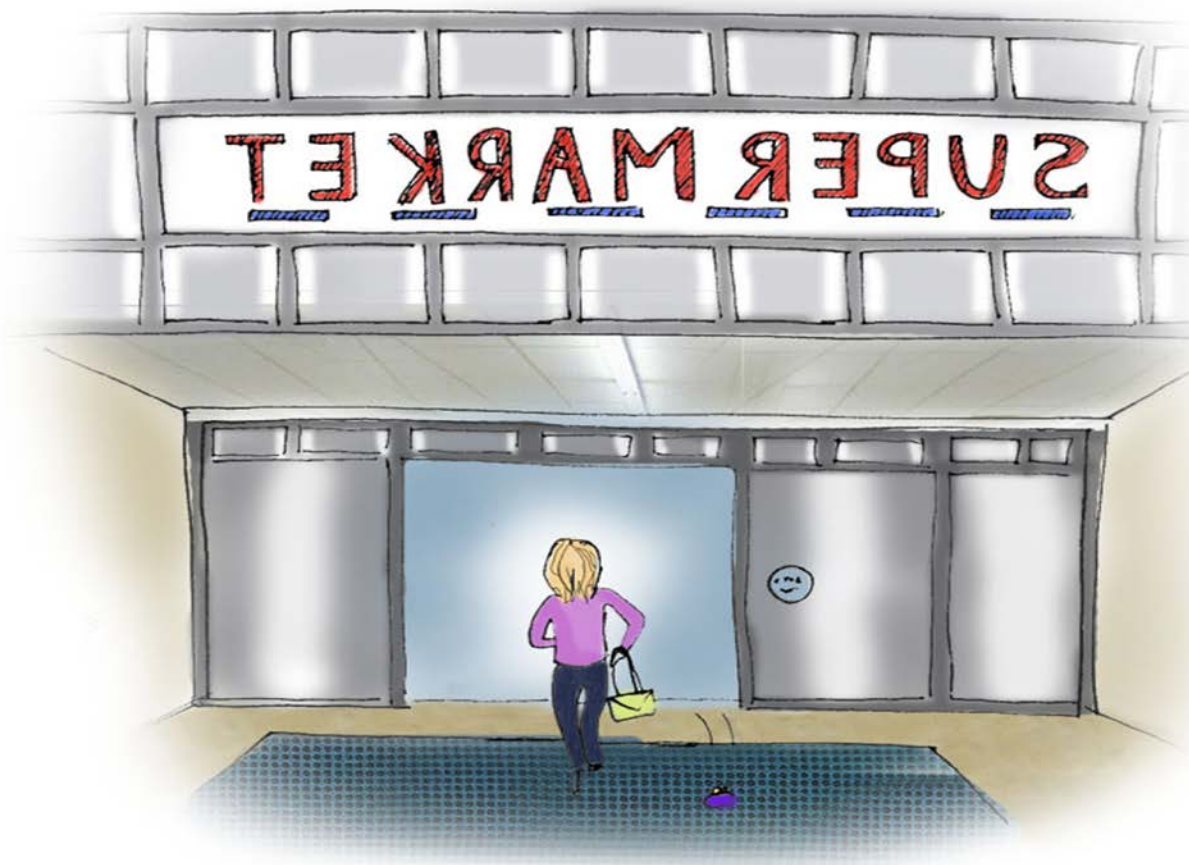
Thursday ...

Today, Emma returns.  
She hides.





Dan talks to a girl.

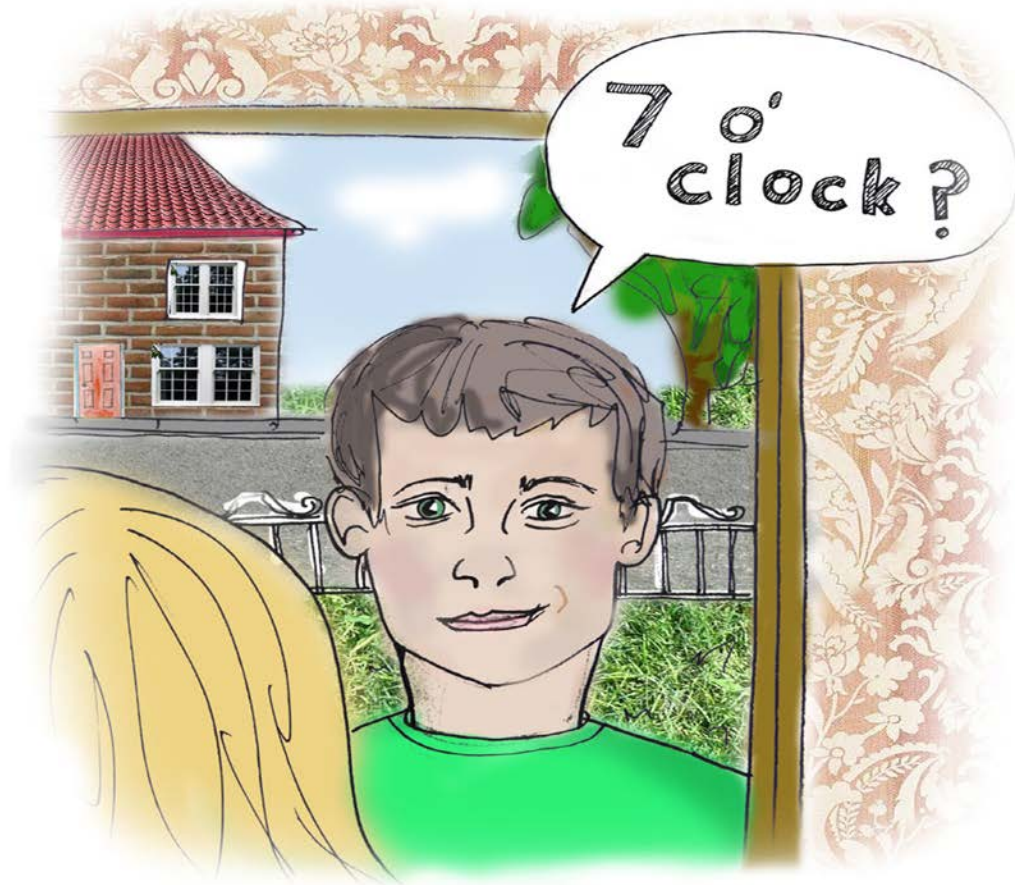


Emma runs home.  
She drops her purse.



**Dan finds her purse.**

Friday ...



Dan arrives at Emma's house with the purse.

Dan invites Emma to a restaurant.



Saturday ...

They drive to the  
restaurant.



They arrive at the  
restaurant.  
Emma hates fish!

# Try writing a Simply Stories book

Each page in a 100-300-word book has one to three sentences.

The **protagonist** is sympathetic.

The plot is convincing, interesting and involves some sort of conflict, e.g. wanting something while facing obstacles in getting it. An obstacle can be another person.

The text shows but does not tell, does not state things explicitly but implies through writing in scenes.

Narratives need universal appeal; when you read what you write to a friend, it should engage him/her.

**Step 1:** decide on a protagonist and **write an outline** for the start, middle and end of a narrative

**Step 2:** take the outline and **write some scenes**

**Step 3:** **edit** the text

**Step 4:** **linguistically simplify** your text

Then find a talented artist to provide an image to accompany every page of text

# Step 1: Write your outline (ten minutes)

**The beginning:** Decide on a protagonist and put them in a status quo situation

**The middle:** Something happens to change the status quo. Try a desire or challenge which is imposed on the protagonist and for which the stakes are high. Add obstacle/obstacles which confront the protagonist blocking his/her ability to get what they want or need.

**The end:** The protagonist has now dealt with each obstacle and achieved their desire/successfully met the challenge. The story can end with the protagonist returning to the status quo or arriving at another state, for example reaching a new understanding. When writing for adults, avoid simple fairy tale happy endings.



# Step 2: Write scenes

## Telling

**Telling doesn't create immediacy. Linguistically speaking, telling is easily identified through use of copula 'be' and verbs such as 'think', 'feel', 'want' and 'like' that refer to inner states and do not allow the reader to paint a picture in his/her mind. It also uses adjectives and adverbs.**

John is vain. 🗨️

John thinks he should work harder. 🗨️

John feels sad. 🗨️

John wants a better job. 🗨️

John likes his new car. 🗨️

## Showing

**Focus on what the character(s) in a scene do/what happens to them at a particular point in time, in a particular place, using concrete details.**

## Showing uses verbs that depict actions:

Susan is sitting on the sofa downstairs.

John looks in the bathroom mirror.

He combs his hair.

He puts gel in his hair.

He sprays his hair.

He smiles.

## Dialogue is used to show, to imply character, time, space:

The phone rings.

“Hello? Susan! How are you? The pub? Tonight? Oh, so sorry! Tomorrow? Ok, lovely. Bye bye.”

The phone rings.

“Hello? Mary! How are you? Wonderful. See you later!”

## Step 2: Take your outline and write a scene (ten minutes)

**Answer these questions, address the final point and write a scene**

1. What time of day and year is it?
2. What is your protagonist seeing and hearing?
3. Where is he/she: what is under his/her feet; what is above his/her head?
4. What is she/he holding in his/her hand or touching?
5. Who else is in the scene?

And include in the scene something relevant to the protagonist's overall desire/challenge and its frustration by an obstacle (could be another person, could involve dialogue).

# STEP 3: Edit your text (five minutes)

Go over the scene and make sure you know where it fits in your outline (beginning, middle, end). For a complete Simply Story, there should be one scene at the beginning, up to three (or more) scenes in the middle and one scene at the end.

## **Make sure that your scene**

- Shows, doesn't tell; change copula 'be' and psych verbs to action verbs
- Contains words that contribute to the narrative.
- Contains only sentences that contribute to the narrative.
- Contains only characters who move the narrative forward.

# STEP 4: Linguistically simplify text (five minutes)

**Morphosyntax**: Your sentences should be simple, with canonical syntax - subject, verb, object – early stage Organic Grammar and in the present tense. They should not be joined in any way (not even with ‘and’ or ‘because’)

**Pronouns**: Don’t use them at all, particularly ‘there’ and ‘it’. Avoid personal pronouns and instead use names.

**Phonology + orthography**: Check your content words and try to replace those you can with short CVC words with regular spelling

**Adverbs and adjectives**: Remove them.

**Nouns and verbs**: Use words you can imagine readers will already know from survival vocabulary.

To take your narrative further, find images to enhance your text,  
lay it out and make it available to learners.

Pictured are learners and volunteers at Newcastle University's Magic Mondays with books written following these guidelines .

