Relevant objectives

**Year 1 Term 1**
Range: stories with familiar settings
T 4 to read familiar, simple stories…;
T 9 to write about events in personal experience linked to a variety of
familiar incidents from stories;

**Year 2 Term 1**
Range: stories… with familiar settings
T 6 to discuss familiar story themes;
T 10 to use story structure to write about own experience in same/similar form;

**Year 3 Term 1**
Range: stories with familiar settings
T 1 to compare a range of story settings…;
T 2 how dialogue is presented in stories…;
T10 using reading as a model, to write own passages of dialogue;
T11 to develop the use of settings in own stories by:
- writing short descriptions of known places;
- writing a description in the style of a familiar story;

**Year 4 Term 3**
Range: stories/short novels that raise issues
T 1 to identify social, moral or cultural issues in stories;
T 8 to write critically about an issue or dilemma raised in a story, explaining the problem, alternative courses of
action and evaluating the writer’s solution;
T11 to explore the main issues of a story by writing a story about a dilemma and the issues it raises for the
character;
T12 to write an alternative ending for a known story and discuss how this would change the reader’s view of the
characters and events of the original story;
T13 to write own longer stories in chapters from story plans.
Writing explanations and principles

Sometimes stories begin with familiar settings but become magic stories where characters are taken to other worlds. C.S. Lewis’ Narnia series and many of Roald Dahl’s stories are like this. While these can, of course, be read as part of the range of stories ‘with familiar settings’, stories like the Shirley Hughes’ Alfie series, Jacqueline Wilson’s novels, or ‘Just William’ would more readily be seen as fitting into this genre. In these stories, the characters stay within range of home and community. The emphasis is on everyday experience and events revolve around characters within family, friendship or community groups. Relationships are important and often the central character(s) grows in experience during the story.

Familiar settings might also include school - as in Chris Powling’s stories. Adults are usually absent from the main parts of the story unless they are portrayed as amusing, inadequate or needing help from the central child character. Groups of friends are a familiar feature. The stories often tell about small or large deceptions, secrets and attempts to outwit ‘the adults’. Many stories with familiar settings are humorous, drawing on everyday mishaps and triumphs.

When commenting on novels with familiar settings for older Key Stage 2 readers, some critics suggest that these often show a view of life that is too harsh, too full of ‘gritty realities’. They argue that young people should be allowed flights of imaginative fancy, which do not force them to face the unpalatable truths of some experiences within families or communities. Others, however, would say that through reading and writing about genuine experience, young people come to be able to handle those realities more securely. Although the National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching explicitly lists ‘stories with familiar settings’ in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4, young readers in Years 5, 6 and beyond will need to be introduced to more demanding novels set within homes and communities - about football, friendship or families - and presenting the problems and possibilities associated with young people growing in understanding.
Themes

Because of the emphasis on relationships between characters, the themes of stories with familiar settings are often about learning the ‘lessons of life’. In the early years these may be represented by the child - in *This is the Bear* (Sarah Hayes) experiencing the emotions of losing and being reunited with a loved toy, or the girl in *Granpa* (John Burningham) having to face the consequences of her own behaviour and then the realities of the death of a grandparent. Short stories such as Ann Campbell’s Julian series, or Mary Hoffman’s *Starring Grace* (developed from *Amazing Grace*), give a humorous slant to sibling relationships, celebrating the tiny successes of life such as planting seeds or making - and eating - lemon puddings! Older readers are presented with lessons about loyalty to friends and family and facing moral dilemmas, as in Jacqueline Wilson’s *Double Act*, for example, or Jamila Gavin’s *Uncle Chatterjee*.

There are some stories, picture books particularly, which simply present everyday experience as a familiar reference point; for example, Jan Ormerod’s *Sunshine and Moonlight*, or the humorous Tony Ross books, like *I Want My Potty* where the ‘events’ are the patterns of getting up, washing, eating, eating, playing, going to school, going home, going to bed, which give the structure to everyday life. These allow young readers to bring their own experiences to the texts and to begin to use those experiences as a basis for writing. Year 1 and Year 2 There is the danger, however, of ‘stories with familiar settings’ tending to represent only white, middle class, often urban, families. Philip Dupasquier’s book (available in Big Book form) *A Land Far Away* offers a comparative pictorial narrative on each page of a boy in the UK and a boy in another country following their everyday activities.

Older readers can measure their own developing ideas and feelings - making decisions about right and wrong, tolerance, a sense of self worth, feelings of isolation, jealousy or fear - through novels by Gillian Cross, Maurice Gleitzman or Robert Swindells. Often novels for fluent and experienced readers introduce issues about parents and other adults who enter everyday life. Absent fathers have been a motif from *Little Women* (L.M. Alcott) and *The Railway Children* (E.E. Nesbit) to Philippa Pearce’s *The Way to Sattin Shore*. Inadequate or ‘problem’ adults are portrayed in Gene Kemp’s or Anne Fine’s novels.

Drama and role-play are ideal ways of exploring themes and issues, dilemmas and possible decisions (see Year 4 Term 3). Drama techniques such as thought tracking, conscience alley, hot-seating, and forum theatre can be used to look at issues and to try out alternative courses of action in imaginative safety.
Structure and organisation

Since many stories in this genre deal with everyday life, the structure often follows the patterns of daily living. Events may happen within a relatively short time-frame - a couple of hours in some short stories - or over a year or so. Such longer stories may flash back to earlier incidents but the patterns of everyday life still permeate. The structure is likely to follow a ‘problem-resolution’ format. The central character’s ‘problem’ may be caused either by her/his actions or because of a difficulty in a relationship with another character or characters. There is likely to be some adult intervention - either to complicate the problem or to help resolve it.

Stories that are part of a series may share a regular pattern. Humorous stories like Richmal Crompton’s Just William series have a similar structure to traditional trickster tales. William has a lot in common with Anansi, coming up with solutions to problems (which have often been self-made) and attempting to outwit ‘authority’ figures. Enid Blyton’s Famous Five series follow a straightforward problem-resolution structure. The predictability of the text structure of many stories set in familiar surroundings is a great strength; young readers have a very clear scaffold of incident and chapter structure to use as a model.

When preparing for writing ‘stories with familiar settings’, storytelling based on anecdotes from personal history can be an excellent way of capturing ideas. Almost everyone has a ‘naughty story’, for example, and these can be easily demonstrated by the teacher telling a personal anecdote and using it as a model for creating a simple story structure. The events will be chronological but often there are little bits of background information which have to be woven in: I don’t know why I did it, I was always such a good child… or… that particular neighbour always complained about us playing too near the flowers… and blending these with the narrative can be effectively demonstrated and part of supported composition. Another good starting point is a simple description of a favourite toy or game “from when you were very young”. These descriptions quickly turn to anecdotes about siblings, parents, losing toys, where they are now… and can equally well be modelled to create a sequential structure which has descriptive elements.
Setting

When children write their own stories with familiar settings they should use their own lives as a basis. This will mean that simple tales can be built around everyday events, such as - funny times, arguments, getting lost, sharing bedrooms, getting ill, jokes, babies and what they get up to, moving home, etc.

Basing stories in a well-known place is a technique used by many authors. For instance, Alan Garner’s *Weirdstone of Brisingamen* is set on the hillside right outside where he lives. This is a helpful strategy for young writers as it means that they do not have to invent the setting. They can use what they already know. Visiting places, writing on location, taking notes or photographs and using them for their writing are helpful strategies. It is often the tiny details that help to bring settings alive in stories and if the location is well known to the writer it is more likely that this sort of homely detail can be included.

Style

The style of stories will vary according to the personal preferences of authors. Generally, however, stories with familiar settings are more likely to be first person narrative with an immediate tone, e.g. *It’s no good. I’m in trouble again. It was only a window, after all. Anyone would think that it was the Bank of England the way they’re all carrying on.*

The thoughts of characters may well be included as part of the narrative. Dialogue will be about people, friends, dilemmas, and will form an important part of the narrative drive of the story.