

Chris Bradford – Ninja Writing Workshop

Bio: Chris Bradford is the bestselling author of the YOUNG SAMURAI, NINJA and BODYGUARD series.

He has written 32 books to date, been published in more than 25 languages and been nominated for 30 book awards. He also won the Northern Ireland Book Award 2011, the Hampshire Book Award 2014, the Brilliant Book Award 2014 and the Quick Read Award 2017.

Chris says, 'I write the type of books I'd want to read - books filled with relentless action, believable characters and a plot that twists and turn through the pages!'

Find out more about Chris at: www.chrisbradford.co.uk



Book: NINJA trilogy
(Barrington Stoke)



Extract: *A young ninja on a deadly mission...*

I wait under the floorboards.

I've been hidden here for over an hour, lying still as a stone.

My name is Taka. This is my first mission as a ninja and I must not fail!

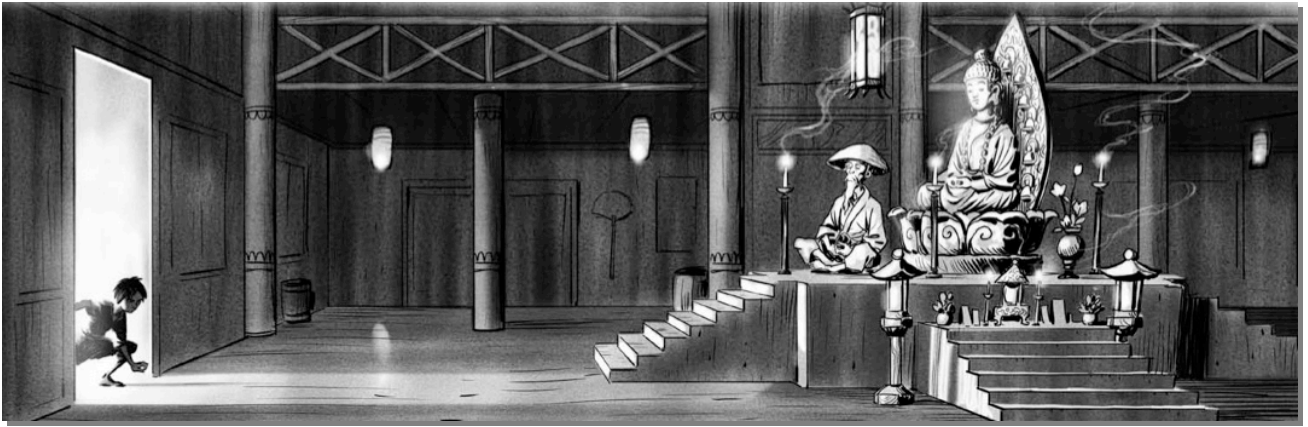
Workshop: Black Belt Story Starters

Time: 1 hour

Materials needed: Access to the internet; interactive whiteboard/projector for vision; speakers for sound; pens, colouring pens and paper for creative writing and drawing tasks; class copies of *Ninja: First Mission* (or photocopies of first chapter available from: www.chrisbradford.co.uk/ninja-series/ninja-first-mission_extract.pdf)

Aim: Idea generation – To stimulate a number of story starters for further development

Key stage: Key Stage 2



The Opening Line (15 minutes)

1. Explain to the pupils:

- Never underestimate the importance of the first sentence and opening paragraph of a book.
- It can set the tone and direction for the whole story.
- The first sentence needs to hook a reader from the start - otherwise the reader will simply find another *better* book to read!

2. So, how to grab a reader from the opening paragraph?

- There are numerous ways to capture a reader's attention.
- One technique is to jump straight into the action.
- Another is to begin with a funny, shocking or unexpected sentence.

In *Ninja: First Mission*, the story starts with these lines from the hero Taka:

*I wait under the floorboards.
I've been hidden here for over
an hour, lying still as a stone.*

Ask the pupils the following questions:

- Why is Taka under the floorboards?
- Who or what is he hiding from?

- Why has he been hidden for so long?
- Why must he lie still as a stone?
- What is he waiting for?

Writing Task (5 minutes)

Ask pupils to write a short paragraph of what they think is going to happen next.

This is an idea generation task, so pupils need only write a rough summary of what they think happens next in the chapter. They do not need to write a complete story (i.e. dialogue, description or narrative).

Listen and read (20 minutes)

- Hand out copies of *Ninja: First Mission* (or photocopies of the first chapter).
- Read the first chapter out loud with class or play the audio book extract (available online at - www.chrisbradford.co.uk/ninja-series/1-first-mission.html).

Ask pupils:

- Did anyone guess correctly why Taka was hidden?
- What were their ideas? Share out loud among class.
- Does the ending of the chapter make them want to read on? Why? And if not, why not?

Story Starters (20 minutes)

Now it is the pupils' turn to create their own story starters.

- Ask pupils to write three exciting/funny/surprising opening paragraphs for their own set of stories.
- These should be between 1 – 3 sentences per paragraph.
- The story can be about any topic – sport, travel, school, friends – and any genre – action-adventure, romance, history, horror, science fiction. The aim is to ‘hook’ the reader and make them want to read on after the opening paragraph.
- Provide pupils with some examples to help with the task:
 - **Surprising:** *I looked out across the glimmering lake and there floating on the water was... a yogurt pot!!!!*
 - **Weird:** *The spider had lived in Mrs. Hartley's Year 6 Classroom for a year now and only one person had heard it speak.*
 - **Funny:** *"Pass the ketchup, please," Steve said, sticking another French fry up his nose.*
- Set a strict time limit of 10 minutes.
- After 10 minutes, ask pupils to choose their best idea of the three and read it out loud to the class.



If any pupil is struggling with the task, give them a few ideas – e.g. a football match where something goes wrong; a horse with a surprising super power; or a teacher with an unusual feature! Don't worry if a pupil only manages one idea.

If any pupil finishes early, ask them to re-read their ideas then choose the best one and try to improve it (this is a writer's process of editing). After that, ask them to continue to write the story from that opening.

Note the time limit should be used as a countdown to put 'pressure' on the pupils to produce something (*5 minutes gone, 2 minutes left!*). Explain afterwards that professional authors have to write to deadlines and this pressure can help the creative process.

Now, collate all the chosen story starters on a display board. You could even challenge other classes to write stories based on these starters!

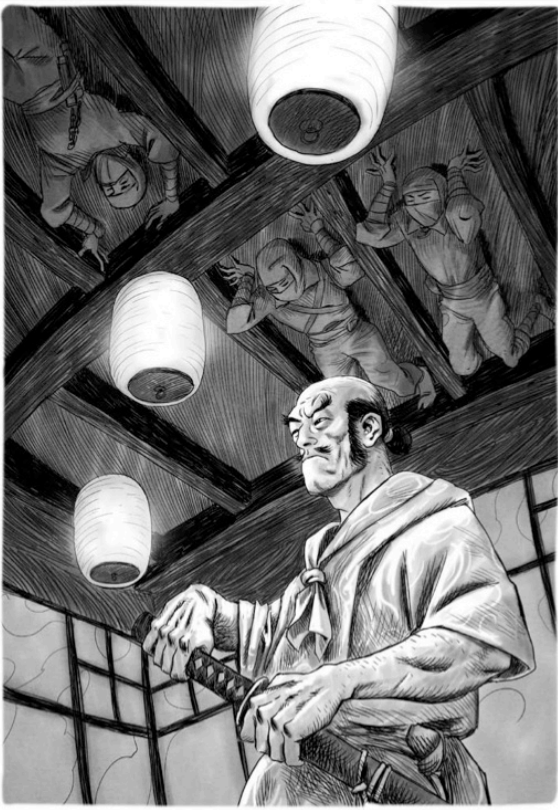
Extension Activities

1. Ninja Chain Writing (30 minutes)

- Split class into groups of 4-6.
- Provide each group with a story starter (one of their own or one supplied by you) written at the top of a large blank page.
- Challenge each group to speed-write a 'chain story'.
- Each pupil has one minute to add follow-up sentences to the previous lines.
- After each minute, the pupil must pass it on to the person on their right.
- Repeat the process until everyone has had at least three turns.
- Ask each group to read out their finished 'chain story'.

This is a fun, exciting and collaborative way to write – and often the results are hilarious and crazy!

2. Picture Starters (1 hour)



Ninja: First Mission uses Manga-style drawings to illustrate and support the written story. This is another good way to hook a reader and immerse them in the story. This is a great activity to engage less able writers and demonstrate creativity in a different media related to writing.

- Ask children to create or draw a scene from *Ninja: First Mission*.
- Read Chapter Two (or Chapter One can be used again) as inspiration for the drawing.
- Alternatively, ask pupils to draw Taka's 'ninja village' - what do they think it might look like? What sort of buildings? Any special traps or defences? Ask children to label their drawings.
- The scene can be produced in any media or style, e.g. pencil, painting, Manga or comic strip.

3. Plan Your Own Matsuri (Full day activity)

- A Matsuri is a Japanese festival with floats, music, dancing, mask-wearing and food.
- You can organise your own Matsuri at your school.

Download more details at www.chrisbradford.co.uk/plan-your-own-matsuri.pdf.

The pack includes guidance on how to make *yukata* (summer kimono), prepare Japanese food (including sushi), play Japanese music and dance properly.

- As part of your Matsuri, ask children to write inspired by this photo.
 - Write the dialogue that these samurai warriors are having prior to a battle.
 - Imagine you are one of the warriors.
 - Describe your feelings about going into battle for the first time.
 - Are you ready? Are you scared? Will you survive?
 - Create a short story that describes what happens to your character during the battle.
- You could collate the stories into a book, or have a reading event for families as part of the day.



Ninja: First Mission by Chris Bradford
Available from all good bookstores and online
£5.99 rrp ISBN 978-1842999394
www.barringtonstoke.co.uk