

Wordsmith

Reviewed by: **John Dabell**

Why Wordsmith? Wordsmith is a new whole-school approach to English that has reading for pleasure at its heart and a rich thread of grammar woven throughout. An online resource, it has stacks of support for adapting to the jungle of curriculum change and offers a trusted framework around which you can create and craft your own lessons.

Produced in conjunction with some of the UK's leading literacy experts, Wordsmith is underpinned by four core principles: contextualised grammar, purpose and audience, varied whole texts, and talk for writing. Using the very best in fiction, non-fiction and poetry and a wide and varied menu of flexible lesson plans – including live units and creative grammar work – Wordsmith promises breadth, flexibility and assurance.

The sheer size and scale of Pearson's new Wordsmith resource is like looking at Tokyo from above as you come in to land. You peer through the window and get a tingling sensation. It has the wow factor even before you've had a chance to look around. Where on Earth do you start?

You're going to need a tour guide and the Components Chart does a good job of this. It gives an excellent overview of the major landmarks and points of interest, all clearly laid out under the headings 'Plan', 'Teach', 'Guide' and 'Assess'. One look at this and your literacy planning nightmares begin to melt away.

Everything is all in one place so we don't have to run around like headless chickens. Once you have activated a Wordsmith subscription, and someone has added teacher and pupil accounts, your journey really begins. Starting at the teacher homepage, you can venture into subsections for 'resources', 'reporting', 'planning' and 'my class'.

I headed straight for the 'resources' section and found mind fuel for Years 1-6. Materials are organised by strand, focus area and type – with progression signposted every step of the way. Everything is nicely filed, so it's not difficult to pick your way through lesson plans, books, interactive whiteboard resources, photocopyables, assessment gems, and additional items such as ebook templates and musical backing tracks.

Resources can be electronically allocated to each pupil, which can be completed in class or at home. Pupils are given their own child-friendly space on the ActiveLearn website that they can make her own. Children can customise avatars, decorate a tree house and play games. They can also 'buy' rewards using the coins they receive for completing a resource. Motivation is sky high.

A whole area is devoted to planning, which allows you to see long-term, medium-term and unit plans. These continue to evolve each term. The lesson plans are

written by experts, can be edited and are thankfully constructed without too much detail. They don't throw up too many surprises in terms of structure but they are creative in content and include intelligent links to other resources, which can be accessed with a single click. The objectives are all carefully crafted for the new curriculum and formative assessment is given a high profile too.

When you delve into the plans, you realise just how good they are. I especially like the News hound unit in Y2, where children can publish their stories on the Pearson website by emailing them to Wordsmith Live. There are many 'live' units within the resource and it's a brilliant idea. They create a tangible sense of excitement and promote writing for real – not just for the classroom.

The ebooks in Wordsmith are ace and simple to find; these are whole books, not extracts. They can be easily navigated and all come with animation tools, so you can mark up the text as you read each page. For me, the best books in this collection are the non-fiction texts because they are jammed full of interactive features, video clips and animations.

Another treat worthy of a special mention is the Wordsmith grammar blasts. These discrete, bite-size activities introduce new concepts and terminology to children, putting spelling and grammar in context.

The verdict – leaves no stone unturned

If your schools needs an injection of literacy expertise, this programme has it in abundance. The range of resources is eye-popping. I think I know how Howard Carter felt when he found King Tut's tomb.

Time-saving, flexible, creative, and very swish, Wordsmith turns in an Oscar-winning performance because it guarantees a healthy balance of all the skills needed to teach the new curriculum.

Wordsmith was reviewed by John Dabell for Teach Primary. Read the full article at www.teachprimary.com/trying_and_tested/view/wordsmith

Find out more

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