**THE LABELS TECHNIQUE**

By James Campbell

The purpose of this technique is to help children expand their ideas before they start writing the story. A lot of people start writing before they really understand what it is they are going to write about. You don't have to know all the details of course but generally speaking, if you know where you're going, you are more likely to get there.

The labels technique will give anyone's idea a greater level of density which will hopefully give it more momentum when they start writing it.

I find that it's very important to let children know that there is no right or wrong to this technique. They can't fail it. Whatever their idea is, it is good enough.

Below is a description of the labels technique is taken from my new book “Write Your Own Book” which is coming soon, published by Bloomsbury.

**I have also made a video demonstrating this technique which you can watch here:** [**https://youtu.be/pTYZnNzcRE8**](https://youtu.be/pTYZnNzcRE8)

*The first thing that you need to do is write your idea at the top of this big blank page. Don't write a great long novel. Just describe your idea. Try and keep it to one medium-sized sentence, about as long as a shoelace. Here are some examples:*

*My cat learns how to do back-flips and joins the circus.*

*The Marmalade Cow takes over a zoo and builds an army of monkeys to rule the world.*

*Poppy is left at home with her baby brother and her parents disappear.*

*You will have noticed (because you are clever) that the page doesn't have any lines for writing. That's because it’s there for you to draw a picture.*

*Don't panic! This book hasn't suddenly turned into an art lesson. You don't have to be good at drawing. In fact, it's probably better for this bit if you are not very good at drawing. (I'll explain why later.)*

*These pictures never go into the finished book. Instead, the pictures are a way of getting to know your ideas better, before you start writing them properly in your story.*

*Imagine your idea is a new friend. This method is going to help you get to know your new friend a little better. So now it's time to get on with it and draw a picture of your idea. Don't worry about making it perfect. It doesn't matter. Make sure you fill up the whole page. No mousey little pictures in the corner.*

*If your idea involves a cat and you're thinking, ‘I don't know how to draw a cat,’ don't worry about it. Draw a rubbish cat.*

*And don't just draw exactly what's in your description of your idea. Add details: background trees, mountains, windows, curtains, camels, rainbows. Whatever seems to fit. Whatever feels to you like it should be in the picture. Don't worry about colouring it in and don't think too much about what it looks like.*

*You should now have written down a short sentence describing your idea and drawn a picture of it. I hope you're not too proud of it because the next thing you're going to do is ruin it!*

*I want you to label your picture. Label everything!*

*See how many labels you can get on the page. Label the labels if you want to. Label the air between the things themselves if it makes you happy. Labels are the bridge between pictures and writing. And that's what we are trying to do with this technique. We are using the picture that we made to help us learn more about our idea and about what we are going to write.*

*If you have made any mistakes or drawn something by accident, then just label it by describing what it is and not what it was supposed to be. Write, ‘funny-looking dog’, or, ‘my sister looks like she is floating’, or, ‘giant hat’. Label everything you see and make fun out of what you have drawn.*

*You should now have a picture of your idea, which you have covered in labels.*

*The next stage is the really exciting bit. You’re going to stare at your labelled picture and try to look between the labels or behind them. Find the really interesting or silly idea, the unusual mistake. Is there a story in this? What is it? Try and find the bit that no one else but you could have thought of.*

*Is there a story in the floating sister? What would happen if your sister learned to fly? Would you be happy for her and go on adventures together? Or would you be jealous and try to steal her powers?*

*Is your story the tale of the funny-looking foot and the hilarious adventures it takes you on?*

*Or maybe your story is about a bonkers pigeon – a pigeon that isn’t afraid of anything, and is constantly getting into all sorts of difficulties.*

*You might want to throw your first idea way because this one is better.*

*You might decide that your first idea was actually much stronger but this technique has helped you learn more about it.*

*There is no right or wrong answer to any of this. Whatever happened in your picture, between the labels and your mind, is right for you and your story.*