Activities with

Onjali Q. Raúf

PART 1

The Mystery Tail Tale

In the interview, Onjali shows off a tiger tail prop from *Where Magic Grows*, explaining that the tiger lost its tail while doing something extraordinary and how odd objects make people ask curious questions. To help children imagine and orally narrate why an animal is missing a feature using descriptive, creative language, this session turns strange props into imaginative backstories.

Activity:

1. Sit children in a circle and place a "mystery box" in the centre containing unusual animal props (e.g. a striped tail, a feathered wing, a shiny horn).
2. Take out one prop, hold it up, and ask: *"Who did this belong to, and how did they lose it?"*
3. Model a short, funny explanation (e.g. *"This tail belonged to a tiger who used it to rescue a monkey from a river!"*).
4. Pass props to pairs or small groups. Ask each child to hold the prop, act out the animal, and tell their partner the heroic or silly story behind it.
5. Have children draw their creature missing its feature and write or dictate a one-sentence caption explaining what happened.

Soundscape

When asked which fictional character she would choose to be forever, Onjali playfully picks the bear from *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* so an entire family would spend their day searching for her. Aiming to develop children's emotional expression, body awareness, and listening skills through sound and movement, this activity transforms a familiar picture-book landscape into an active role-play adventure.

Activity:

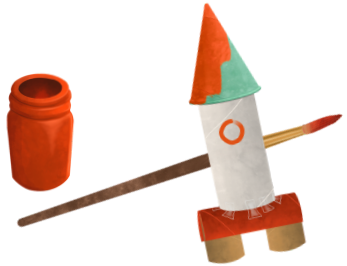
1. Set up four clearly marked zones across the hall or outdoor area to represent story settings: long grass, a cold river, thick mud, and a dark cave.
2. Teach the children a physical movement and sound effect for each zone (e.g. wave arms in the air for *"swishy-swashy"*, stamp slowly for *"squelch-squerch"*).
3. Choose one child or an adult to hide inside the "cave".
4. Lead the class in tiptoeing through each zone, building up the soundscape together using voices and simple percussion instruments.
5. When the class reaches the cave, the bear jumps up and waves. The children turn and tiptoe or jog quietly back through each zone to safety.

Grand Illustrators

Onjali explains how *The Girl at the Front of the Class* was written for younger children after receiving letters from five-year-olds, joking that she only wrote a few words while illustrator Pippa Curnick did all the heavy lifting to make the story come alive. Designed to help pupils understand how concise text and expressive illustration collaborate to convey deep meaning, this task divides creative roles between partners.

Activity:

1. Put children into pairs: Partner A is the Author, and Partner B is the Illustrator.
2. Give the Author a sheet with three blank sentence lines. Challenge them to write a very short mini-adventure using a strict limit of three to five sentences (e.g. *"The door swung open. A tiny shadow entered. It held a silver key."*).
3. The Author reads their sentences aloud to the Illustrator, then hands over the sheet without giving any verbal instructions.
4. The Illustrator uses colour and facial expressions to draw the full scene, interpreting details the Author left out.
5. The pairs look at the finished piece together to discuss what the picture adds to the words, then swap roles for a second round.



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PART 2

The Investigation

Onjali wants young readers to know that no question is too big to ask. She encourages everyone to grab a magnifying glass and be curious detectives! Building on her passion for library archive research, this activity helps pupils develop critical thinking, interview techniques, and non-fiction reporting on real school or community matters.

Activity:

1. Introduce the concept of an investigative reporter who is not afraid to ask curious, polite questions to solve real puzzles.
2. Present the class with a school-based mystery or question (e.g. *"What happens to lost property across a school year?"* or *"How can we make our playground friendlier for new pupils?"*).
3. Working in trios, pupils draft three open-ended interview questions starting with *Why*, *How*, or *What if*.
4. Assign each trio a member of school staff (e.g. site manager, office team, midday supervisor, or a peer) to interview, taking written notes or using voice recorders.
5. Teams return to the classroom, review their notes, and record a short audio recording summarising what they discovered and what actions the school could take next.

Bedtime Mash-Up

Reflecting on how her storytelling journey began at age seven, Onjali reveals that her mother tasked her with putting her energetic younger brother to sleep, which led her to adopt famous television characters and throw them into wild bedtime tales. Intended to build narrative structuring, character pairing, and expressive verbal storytelling skills, this exercise uses character collisions to hook an audience quickly.

Activity:

1. Prepare two tubs of cards: Tub 1 contains well-known characters (e.g. *Paddington, Matilda, The Gruffalo*), and Tub 2 contains unusual locations (e.g. school kitchen, the moon, a pirate ship).
2. Divide the class into groups of three. Have each group draw two character cards and one setting card.
3. Give the groups five minutes to create a short bedtime story that combines these. The rule is that the story **must** end on a dramatic cliff-hanger.
4. Groups take turns sitting in the "storytelling chair" to perform their tale aloud to the class using expressive voices.
5. Have the class vote on which story had the strongest cliffhanger that would keep a listener awake wanting more.

Unsung Heroes: The Blue Plaque Archive

Discussing her historical research, Onjali shares how discovering Tan Kay Hai, a Singaporean-Chinese RAF pilot who flew during the Battle of Britain yet remained absent from standard history books, prompted her to write *The Lion Above the Door.* Focused on developing independent biographical research and persuasive historical writing, this task invites children to rescue overlooked changemakers from obscurity.

Activity:

1. Show the children an image of a heritage blue plaque and explain how Onjali wrote this book to ensure forgotten figures like Tan Kay Hai are remembered.
2. Provide pupils with short research fact files on lesser-known historical figures, local heroes, or Commonwealth volunteers.
3. Ask pupils to extract three core facts: who the person was, the challenge they faced, and what impact they made on the world.
4. Hand out circular card templates. Pupils design a formal Blue Plaque displaying the person's name, dates, and an overarching title (e.g. *"Pioneering Pilot and Wartime Hero"*).
5. Alongside the plaque, pupils write a short tribute. Display the plaques for a gallery walk where pupils read each other's memorials.

