This article presents extracts from *Start Thinking: daily starters to inspire thinking and primary schools* by Marcelo Staricoff and Alan Rees. It is published by Imaginative Minds, the publishers of *Teaching Thinking and Creativity*. The starters have been chosen to exemplify sections of the book. Of course, if the process described in the introduction to this article appeals to you, then you can go on to devise your own starters. *Start Thinking* has over 90 starters grouped into chapters around the themes of *numbers, words, science, philosophy* and *creativity*.

To order a copy of *Start Thinking*, ring our order hotline on 01904 431 213 or visit the online catalogue at www.thinkingonlinecatalogue.co.uk.

Extracts from the popular book of classroom resources by Marcelo Staricoff and Alan Rees

# start thinking

Thinking Skills Starters are enjoyable, open-ended challenges that are suitable for all pupils. They are straightforward yet demanding when used in the right way. We use the term *Starter* to describe a task that greets children as they first enter the classroom in the morning. They start to tackle it as their teacher takes the register. After 10 minutes the teacher and pupils share the ideas the pupils have come up with. They discuss possible implications and extensions of those ideas. Then they move onto other things. Pupils have the option of continuing to work on *Starters* in their own time.

The whole cycle of introducing a *Starter*, sharing and discussing takes no more than 20 minutes and it leaves the class buzzing with excitement and gripped by positive attitudes to thinking and learning which set us up wonderfully for the day ahead. Through *Starters* we are creating a classroom culture in which we all learn together rather than one where only teachers teach and only children learn.

## Starters with all age groups

*Starters* can be enjoyed by all children in the school. The emphasis on enjoyment and sharing is paramount so using *Starters* has to be carefully planned with the children's current abilities and routines in mind.

For example, Foundation and Year 1 teachers tend to work through *Starters* verbally, as a whole-class activity on the carpet and with the teacher recording children's thoughts. Year 2 and 3 children may start to use *Thinking Skills Exercise Books*, but may choose not do *Starters* every day. Instead they may save them as 'special treats', to be done once or twice a week.

It is so important that the children look forward to *Starters* and never regard them as a chore or as 'more work'. Equally, the teacher may wish to use them at times other than the beginning of the day, or they may form the basis of homework tasks or even as open-ended challenges for children to work together with younger partners.

## Starters and 'Habits of Mind'

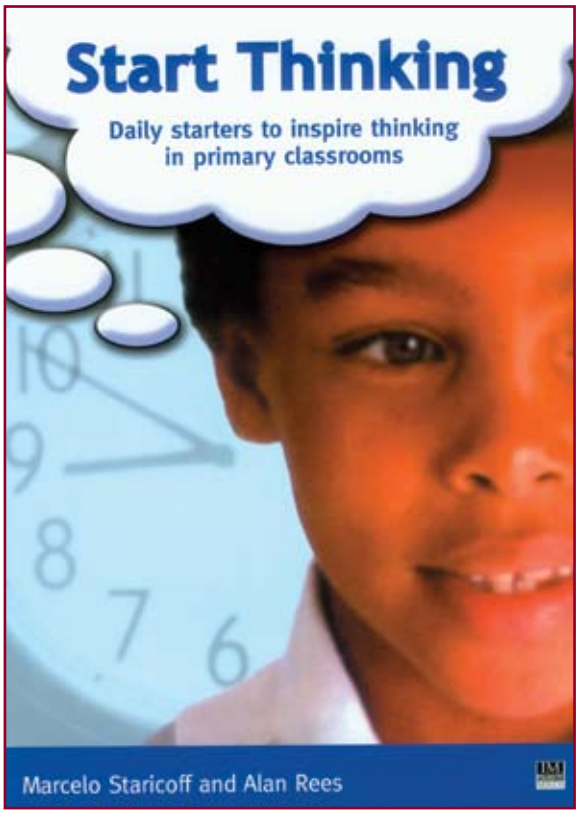
*Starters* can play their part in encouraging children to develop dispositions or Habits of Mind that are positive for learning. There is a growing literature on this topic and an increasing awareness that positive dispositions are important factors contributing a child's progress in school. Using *Starters* will help you to highlight and develop dispositions such as: being resilient, thinking flexibly, finding humour, taking risks, communicating with clarity, problem posing, using imagination and being methodical.

A first step to developing these kinds of dispositions is to draw children's attention to them when you set a *Starter* or when children share their ideas. For example, you could say that a certain *Starter* requires them to work flexibly, carefully or persistently. You could praise children's efforts when they bring one of the dispositions to bear on their work – particularly when they commit themselves to one or more of the thinking processes listed with the *Starter* (for independent and regular commitment to processes such as imagining, evaluating alternatives and giving reasons is evidence of the development of positive learning dispositions). If you are trying to promote a particular disposition with your pupils, the *Starters* will provide you with examples to draw on. You could say: 'remember when Charlie took home the *Four Fours Starter* and worked on it for weeks. That took persistence didn't it. Was it worth it Charlie?' You could easily draw the children's attention to a time when one of them came up with something no-one else had thought of, showing evidence of the disposition to think flexibly. *Starters* can help you to develop positive dispositions in your classroom.

## The impact of Thinking Skills Starters

*Starters* have had a fantastic impact on the school as a whole. In the mornings the teachers often meet in the corridor to discuss who's doing which *Starter* and to compare notes on how they were received by children. Trying the same *Starter* with different year groups and then getting the children together to share their thinking can be a fascinating exercise! Some schools are even using them as warm ups for the staff before staff meetings and INSET days. The impact that *Starters* have had among children, teachers, parents and governors has been, and continues to be, incalculable. What started as a bit of fun in the mornings has become one of the main driving forces behind the concept of a whole-school thinking-skills approach to the Curriculum, and of the way the children have become increasingly motivated to be active participants in their own learning.

*Starters* are very flexible – they can be used as standalone activities such as listing 'what makes you laugh' or they can be woven into the subject-based curriculum. For example, as a precursor to tackling topics on *Ourselves* or *Healthy Living* in Science, children try to think of differences and similarities between blood and ketchup. The task is fun to do and the ideas generated by the children can be used to guide and structure the way the topic is taught from then on. *Starters* often give teachers an insight into pupils' current levels of understanding, their misconceptions and topics that they may be interested in researching further.



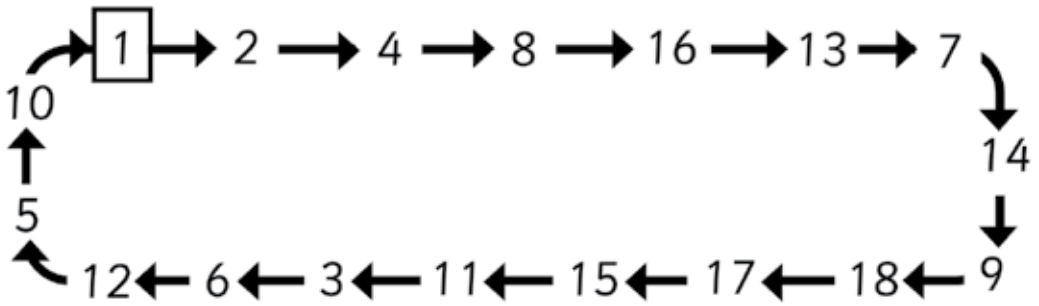

### Summary of how to use Starters

1. Write the *Starter* on the board for pupils to see as they enter the room.
2. Provide any explanations or examples you think the children will need.
3. Allow pupils about 15 minutes to gather their ideas for the *Starter* by writing or drawing in their thinking skills exercise books. Younger children may need to talk rather than write or draw.
4. Invite pupils to share their ideas on the *Starter* paying attention to key processes such as *giving reasons, devising methods* or *categorising*.
5. Encourage pupils to continue adding ideas to their Starter at home if they want to. Be prepared to provide some sharing time in future sessions if children return with developed ideas.

In the starters in the following pages, the box in the top half of each page contains the information the teacher gives to pupils. In the box in the bottom half of each contains some examples of children's work.

# N12 Loop The Loop

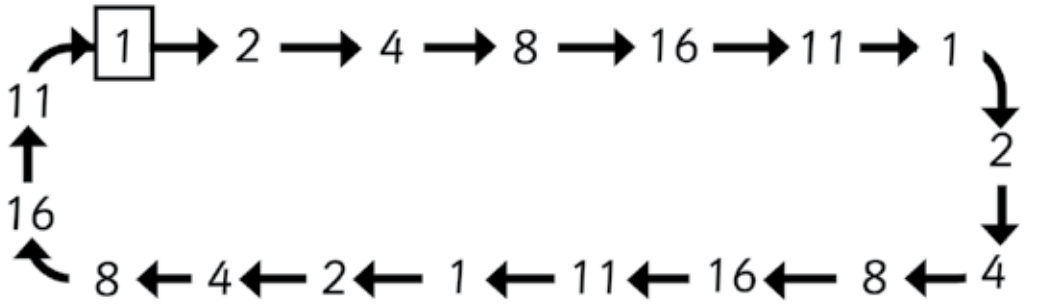
WHAT IS the rule that generates the next number?




COMMENT: Starting at one, the rule that generates the next number is: double the units and add the tens. The children can then experiment with their own loops and their own rules. If the children can't complete a loop by returning to the start number, allow them to stop at their final number.

**1**

YEAR 5




*Rule: Double the units and take away the tens*

| CONTENT: Sequences | PROCESSES: Experimenting and checking, recognising patterns, inventing |
|---|---|

# S3 Is Science in Everything?

## Can you think of anything that does not involve science?

COMMENT: A wonderful way of highlighting the importance of science and scientists to our society. This will really test the children. Most things will have some connection to science!

**1**

YEAR 6

*It is probably impossible to find something not to do with science like it is with maths. What about nothingness?*

*Some things don't seem to have anything to do with science but they do if you think about them.*

WRITING *The process of making the paper.*

*The ink is a chemical and it is made.*

*Computers depend on scientific inventions from the past.*

*How do our brains think about what to write?*

*How do our hands know where to move?*

| CONTENT: The nature of science | PROCESSES: Imagining, connecting |
|---|---|

# P13 Growing Up is a Hard Thing to Do

## Childhood – Adulthood
## What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

COMMENT: Fascinating insight into life from the children's perspectives. A great way to find out what they perceive as fair and unfair, what they enjoy, wished they could do, don't ever want to stop doing and so on. It is a great one for comparing results across year groups. All lists will suggest follow-up questions like: 'Why can't adults be cheeky too?' or 'Why is being cheeky an advantage?' Many of the lists reveal a concern with the concept of 'freedom'. It is worth discussing this concept with children. Is freedom always a good thing?

**1** YEAR 3

| ADVANTAGES | |
|---|---|
| CHILD | ADULT |
| You get chocolate | You are in charge |
| You can be cheeky | You can shout |
| You can watch cartoons | You can go to hotels |
| You can buy toys | You have lots of money |
| You get pocket money | You can go out |
| You can play games | You can stay up late |
| You can climb trees | You can go out shopping |
| You can get taken on holiday to Spain | You can wear earrings |

| | |
|---|---|
| CONTENT: Children, grown-ups | PROCESSES: Comparing, enquiring, valuing, giving reasons |

# C5 Inventing Words

## Invent your own words and give their meaning

COMMENT: Children love playing with words and it is very interesting to let them make some up. Their definitions can be very entertaining! Could the children write rules for the others to use when making up new words? They should base the rules on their own inventions.

**1**

YEAR 3

| New word | Definition |
|---|---|
| Ovaralities | Similarities that are obvious |
| Crockle | The sound of an old lady |
| Doft | Soft soil |
| Buggle | To juggle with bugs |

**2**

YEAR 6

| New word | Definition |
|---|---|
| Aquse | Underwater house |
| Femit player | Female cricket player |
| Bodzine | Magazine about the human body |
| Kidologist | Someone who studies kids |

| CONTENT: Words, definitions | PROCESSES: Inventing, connecting, assessing alternatives, devising methods |
|---|---|