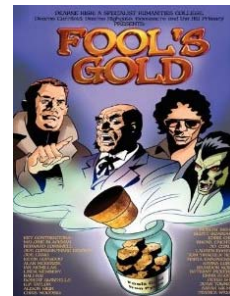


Reaching for Gold

The Dearne High has published its own graphic novel which features students, staff and famous writers/artists as characters in real locations. It is co-written and produced by students at the school aged from 12 to 15 years.

Scott, Jessica, Brandon, Lauren, Bethany and Savina are haunted by three young children who died in different parts of Yorkshire. Intrigued, they persuade their teachers to organise educational visits to Wakefield, Scarborough and Whitby to help exorcise the ghosts and save their souls. The students' journey is full of physical and mental dangers as they encounter a host of real and imaginary characters and famous authors. Who will help them turn Fool's Gold into Pure Gold?



Getting Started

Teenagers at the Dearne High wanted to write something that would be read by 'anyone and everyone', says Peter Shaw, assistant headteacher at Dearne High. He devised the plot and worked with a number of students, teachers and professional writers to produce the finished product. Local businesses and the Hayes group helped fund the finished publication.

Shaw says, "We are continually working to raise standards in reading at the school. We wanted to work with published authors to ensure the standard of our book was high but also because we felt the notion of celebrity writers would encourage students to get involved and / or to read the finished book."

'Fool's Gold' includes support from Alan McKenzie (editor of 2000AD during 1991-1995), artwork by Marvel illustrator Kevin Hopgood and written contributions from a number of award-winning British writers including G.P.Taylor, Robert Swindells, Chris Wooding, Bernard Cornwell, Malorie Blackman, Bali Rai, Linda Newbery, Ian McMillan and Alison Weir.

Writing Fool's Gold

All the writers, teachers and professionals involved in the book agreed to be depicted as the main characters within the storyline. Some worked with the college in locations such as Scarborough and Whitby, whilst others worked with the team via email and the internet.

Fool's Gold has chronological chapters and a single storyline but the story is multi-layered, juxtaposing the students' creation of the book with the events of the storyline, and adding other elements such as diary pieces by real authors that have been written or edited to fit within the story.

Broad appeal

Shaw says, “We wanted to make sure that the book appealed to as wide a readership as possible, so we included graphic novel elements and other approaches.” The students have used a variety of techniques to tell the story, including prose, cartoon pages, poetry, songs, news styles and MSN text, which have all helped to tell and illustrate the main story. There are also specially devised graphic images converted from photographs. The cover and several cartoon pages were drawn by Kevin Hopgood and Deane students. All of the graphic images were produced by students.

Deane High has also used the project to help develop its links with primary partners. For example, primary school pupils took part in the visits to the locations featured in the book and Deane High students also presented the finished book to their partner primary schools at a number of different events.

Building literacy skills

Deane High is a humanities college and pupils entering the school are often below average in their reading skills. The project has given Deane High an opportunity to build its links with the schools and to focus on incoming pupils’ literacy levels. The book is now a set text for students below Level 4 on entry to the school and the title is also featured in the school’s accelerated reader programme. The books by authors featured in Fools’ Gold have also become very popular in the school’s library, says Shaw.



Up to 100 students took part in the project with a group of 20 more closely involved. For them, the project was overwhelmingly positive, says Shaw, and many have shown a greater interest in reading and writing following the project, thanks partly to a boost in their own self-esteem, but also as a result of the involvement by published authors. Shaw says, “We have been using writing as a way into reading. It may sound like the wrong way around, but it gets children to see writing as a craft and helps them to recognise good writing techniques.

Their next project is already being planned – a fully-funded book that they can distribute to regional schools and libraries.

If you would like to purchase a copy of Fools’ Gold at £4.99, email: j.townend@barnsley.org