

# EXPERT AUTHORS' TOP TIPS!

Bestselling children's authors Jeanne Willis and Joseph Coelho share their top tips for writing a story to help you get started on your fable.

774

## TIP 1: GATHER IDEAS

● **Jeanne says:** If you're stuck for a story, gather some surprising or unexpected facts about the subject to inspire you. Good places to search are newspaper articles, magazines and non-fiction books. You could also ask friends and family about any experiences they've had. Another trick is to think of an interesting question and find the answer online – ask a trusted adult to help.

## TIP 2: MAKE NOTES

● **Joseph says:** Always carry a notebook wherever you go. You never know when a good idea will hit but if you have a notebook with you, you can be sure to record your fabulous ideas when they arrive.

## TIP 3: LOOK AROUND

● **Joseph says:** Observe the world around you, take note of the sights and sounds, colours and smells that wash over you on your journey to and from school, as you go for lunch or meet with friends. All those details can be great starting points.

## TIP 4: TAKE INSPIRATION

● **Joseph says:** Read, read, read. Read about the things that interest you, and get into the habit of asking yourself questions as you read. You never know when a little-known fact or a turn of phrase might inspire a whole new story.

## TIP 5: SET THE SCENE

● **Joseph says:** Have a go at drawing your characters and the situations they find themselves in. Sometimes drawing a scene can help you imagine how things might play out in your story.

## TIP 6: START STRONG

● **Jeanne says:** Make sure your opening sentence grabs the reader's attention. It should act like a teaser, hinting at what's to come. Don't go on about the weather or the wallpaper, dive straight in and make your reader want more. One of my favourite opening sentences, written by JM Barrie, is: "All children, except one, grow up." Straight away, I had to know which child DIDN'T grow up and why! I kept reading, discovered it was Peter Pan and I wasn't disappointed.

## TIP 7: ENJOY IT!

● **Jeanne says:** Write a story that you would like to read. Think about your favourite books, whether you're into heroes, humour or hedgehogs. You're in charge – create characters that fascinate you, take them on a journey and enjoy the ride.

## TIP 8: FAB FINISH

● **Jeanne says:** Have a surprising end twist – never finish with: "It was all a dream." That's a cop-out writers use when they can't think of a good ending! Don't let your story fizzle out like a soggy sparkler – when you've chosen your theme and created your characters, decide on the ending at the beginning. That way, when you start writing, you'll have a target to aim for and leave your reader satisfied.

## TIP 9: TEST IT OUT

● **Joseph says:** Share! Share your stories with your friends and family, find out what parts of your story they liked and what parts they feel could be made even better. By getting feedback on your writing you can make sure that your storytelling skills are getting the very best possible workout.

## TIP 10: SLEEP ON IT

● **Jeanne says:** When you think your story is perfect, put it in a drawer overnight. Look at it again in the morning with fresh eyes and give it a polish. Check spelling and punctuation. Is the opening sentence a stunner? Have you kept to the plot, cut out any waffle and tied up any loose ends? Will the ending knock the judges' socks off? Well done, I'm crossing my fingers for you. Good luck!



## MEET THE AUTHORS

### Jeanne Willis

Jeanne Willis is an award-winning children's author and scriptwriter. She started writing when she was just five. Her books include *Who's in The Loo?* and *The Goffins* series.



Justine Stoddart

### Joseph Coelho

Joseph is an award-winning poet and author, who served as the Waterstones Children's Laureate between 2022–2024. His books include the *Luna Loves* series and *The Boy Lost in the Maze*.

