

The Kielder Brag: Teacher Toolkit



Kielder Brag illustration (detail), Niel Bushnell.

This Toolkit has been designed to help teachers to engage KS2 pupils with The Kielder Brag transmedia fairy tale through the website and a range of curriculum-linked resources and activities.

What is The Kielder Brag?

"The Kielder forest and surrounding area is an ancient landscape that has been forged by nature and industry into the form we see today. But there are secrets hidden between the trees and the water, between the sky and the land, secrets known only by a select few. Ask in the right place and you'll hear rumours of sightings and stories, of things unreal that hide in the landscape, of faeries and monsters living side-by-side with man and machine. But details are hard to come by, and only the bravest can find out the truth of Kielder." (Niel Bushnell, author and artist)

The Kielder Brag is a modern mythology in the form of a transmedia fairy tale written and developed by author and artist Niel Bushnell. The Kielder area is a relatively new landscape, man-made in the last century and, for the most part, less than fifty years old. As such the area does not yet have its own folklore and legends, something that only occurs over a longer period of time. The Kielder Brag has therefore been developed by the author as an engineered folklore for Kielder in the form of a multi-platform, interactive story, which takes the form of a fairy tale handed down over generations.

The Kielder Brag story

"This is a really old story that I found in a book of local legends. It was in a second-hand bookshop and was in really bad condition. The author's name is

missing, as is the end of the story, but this might be the earliest written account of the Kielder Brag, so it's worth taking a look.” (Niel Bushnell)

Start by reading The Kielder Brag story, which can be accessed in two ways:

- As a pdf through the Resources section; and
- As chapter-by-chapter readings by author Niel Bushnell, filmed at Kielder, through the Story Reading section.

The story is presented as an old story set in Kielder Forest. No one knows where the story can begin and the last few pages are missing so there is no ending. The story is interactive, i.e. pupils can interact, explore and add to it through the website and online platforms by uploading creative writing, drawings and illustrations and photographs, and by contributing to the Kielder Brag blog.

The online content is presented in true fairy tale fashion as ‘digital breadcrumbs’. The intention is not to fool anyone, the website has rather been designed to create a narrative in the viewer’s mind and allows pupils – and adults – to ‘play along’, joining in and adding to the digital experience by: creating their own story endings; developing their own creative writing and stories; drawing the characters and story settings; and maybe even joining in with the brag hunting themselves on visits to Kielder.

What is a transmedia fairy tale?

“Transmedia storytelling is the process of conveying messages, themes or storylines to a mass audience through the artful and well-planned use of multiple media platforms...”
Jef Gomez, Starlight Runner Entertainment

In transmedia storytelling, a story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. A single story is told across multiple digital platforms and formats, allowing for multiple entry points into the narrative. Content generated by people engaging with the story is integral to the narrative and increases the rate of ‘spreadability’ across social platforms.

Interaction with the story is a key part of The Kielder Brag. The project has been designed to allow children to add to the story through their contributions to the website. Pupils and teachers can:

- Write and upload their own endings to the story (which has been deliberately left unfinished by the author).
- Add drawings, illustrations and photographs to the Gallery.
- Add to the blog with their own thoughts and experiences of Brag hunting.

The Kielder Brag website

The Kielder Brag website is the main focus of activity. It includes:

- **The Kielder Brag story**, provided as filmed story readings within the Kielder landscape. The story is told over four chapters, with chapter 4 having two versions: one version (for teachers only) is the story ending as written by author Niel Bushnell; and the second version is unfinished, providing an opportunity for pupils to finish the story in their own words.
- **Brag hunter Simon Davison's blog posts and video clips.** Simon Davison is an outdoor adventurer and brag hunter who claims to have first saw the brag whilst on a family trip to Kielder when he was ten years old. Simon has been brag hunting ever since and his blog posts and video diaries document his experiences and findings whilst tracking the brag out at Kielder.
- **A Resources section** with a range of information, including: the Teacher Toolkit outlining the Kielder Brag project and setting out how to use the website; a downloadable PDF of the Kielder Brag story; and information and activities linking the Kielder Brag to curriculum-based teaching and learning.
- **A Gallery section** for pupils to upload their own drawings, illustrations and photographs resulting from their engagement with the project.
- **A Story Endings section** where pupils can upload their own versions of the ending to the Kielder Brag story.

Introducing pupils to The Kielder Brag

1. Explore: What is a fairy tale? A children's story about magical and imaginary beings and lands; a fairy story (dictionary definition).

Explore the topic of fairy tales with pupils. How many do they know? What are their favourites? Work with the children to identify the characteristics of a fairy tale:

- They are set in the past
- They start with some form or variation of "Once upon a time"
- They include fantasy or make-believe elements.
- They are set in enchanted settings such as forests, castles, water or kingdoms.
- They have clearly defined good and evil characters.
- They include magical elements.
- They often teach a clear lesson.

2. Briefly introduce pupils to transmedia storytelling

Pupils are likely to 'get' the concept quickly as social media and gaming is such a big part of their lives.

3. Watch the readings of The Kielder Brag on the website.

Watch each chapter of the story with a short class discussion after each chapter. Talk about the main characters, where the story is set, what are the main themes, etc.

4. Discussion around brags, kelpies and fairy folk.

After watching and discussing the story, focus in on mythical creatures within fairy tales n general and the Kielder Brag in particular.

A brag is a creature from the folklore of Northumberland and Durham that usually takes the form of a horse or donkey. It is fond of tricking unwary wayfarers into riding on its back before throwing the rider into a pool of water or a bush, afterwards running off laughing, much like the Bäckahästen (brook horse) or kelpie.

Kelpie, or water kelpie, is the Scots name given to a shape-shifting water spirit inhabiting the lochs and pools of Scotland. It has usually been described as appearing as a horse but is able to adopt human form.

Fairy folk (and the tales that grow around them) come in many different forms and are infinitely adaptable.

5. Watch Simon's Phone Camera and Simon's Camera Trap films on the website

Simon's camera footage demonstrates well the interactive nature of the website and starts the mystery of the brag and the brag hunting elements of the project. At this point, pupils should be ready to get started on their engagement with the story and contributions to the website.