

Activity

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Justin Somper is the author of the *Vampirates* series of books. Here, on Authorfy, he sets the challenge of writing a message in a bottle. Are you up to it?

What should I do?

Accept Justin Somper's 10 minute challenge!

Visit Authorfy's fantastic '10 Minute Challenges' page <https://authorfy.com/10minutechallenges/> and find Justin Somper's challenge. Watch it and complete the task he sets – to write a message in a bottle! What can you come up with in just ten minutes?

Justin asks you three questions to consider to help you quickly plan and clarify your idea:

- Who is sending the message?
- Where is this letter being sent from?
- What is the writer going to say?

It's also important to decide *when* your letter is being sent. You are to imagine you're the writer, but what year are you living in? Careful with this: you wouldn't write, 'I come from Elizabethan times...' if you were somebody actually living in 1588! (Periods of history tend to get their names after they have ended.) You may, however, write something about 'our Good Queen Bess', mention another well-known character from that time or an event.

Review and improve your message

So far, you've only had ten minutes to draft your message in a bottle. You'll probably need to spend a lot more time improving your writing through editing to make sure it's the best it can possibly be. Even Justin was surprised at his own lack of crossings out so it sounds like he usually has to complete many, many more drafts of his work until he's satisfied with it.

Re-read your work several times. Each time, try to focus on one area to improve. You may find it useful to consider the following:

- Think about the 'voice' of your character and 'register' of their writing. That means you will need to choose words and construct sentences that fit with their personality, status, the times and the country they live in and the level of formality you would expect from someone in their position. A 16th century, 32 year-old woman – adventurous explorer and brilliant botanist - who has been shipwrecked, for example, is unlikely to write in a way that sounds like a nine year-old boy living in 2029 who's having an exciting holiday with his pet squirrel! Read your letter aloud, putting on the voice of the character who wrote it. Does the vocabulary and grammar sound like it should for them? What needs changing?
- Choose a few words or phrases to change using different vocabulary and underline these in one colour. The person writing Justin's message selected very carefully – what differences are there between the words 'gather', 'forage', 'plunder' that he used? Why did he list those words in that particular order (think how it might have changed our opinion and understanding of the character as it moves from one to the other)? What changes can you make to your word choices to better hint at the character's personality and situation?
- Does all your writing make grammatical sense (unless you've changed something on purpose to give the effect of sounding like the character)? Look closely at noun-verb agreement for example and correct any mistakes, e.g. 'I were/is' or 'they was/is' → 'I was/am' or 'they were/are', etc.
- Review how you've linked ideas – are they clear to your reader? It's no use sending a message in a bottle if the person who finds it can't understand what you mean! It's helpful to ask someone else to read your work back to you at this point: if they look confused or stumble when reading, there's probably something you need to improve or correct!
- You may already be in the good habit, when writing, of drawing a wiggly line under or dot beside words you are not sure how to spell. This means you don't have to interrupt your flow when writing (though should give spelling your best go at the time), but allows you to go back and check and correct afterwards. Find some spellings to check and then go check and correct them!

Annotate (write notes on) your work and redraft as many times as you like to make all the changes that you need.

Present the finished version

You'll now need to think about how you're going to present your final, best copy. Be as creative as you like! We certainly wouldn't recommend throwing bottles in oceans(!) but could you write your message out on whatever your character might have used and pop it inside a bottle or other container to present it in an exciting way?

Share your work

How might you share your work with your friends and your teacher(s)? Can you film yourself reading your letter, like Justin Somper, or take photographs, then email or upload to a shared area? Could you create a copy of your work to post?

You can tweet what you've been up to using the Twitter handle @BabcockLDPEng and the hashtag #BabcockEnglishAtHome.

IMPORTANT: If you decide to share some of your work publicly, just remember everything you have been taught about staying safe online, and do check with the person who looks after you before posting anything.

Things that could help me

You can find a good online dictionary at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>

Change it up! ...Go further!

- A) Who will find your message in a bottle? Write the section of a story in which somebody discovers it, reads the letter and decides what to do about it.
- B) Use your research skills to find out more about messages in bottles! How many have been found? From whom? Where? When?! What sorts of things do they say? What's the oldest message that's been discovered?...
- C) Discover more about Justin Somper's *Vampirates*: <https://www.vampirates.co.uk/>. On this site, you can even read some sample chapters from the series.

Notes for parents and teachers

You may want to discourage your child from throwing anything into the sea themselves! They could investigate other items that are washed ashore, however: flotsam and jetsam, mermaids...

For now while schools are shut, there are new 10 Minutes Challenges uploaded on Authorfy every day so it's worth checking back regularly to see what others might appeal to your child. All videos are embedded in the site so should be nice and safe, though you may wish to preview them to check which writers' books are appropriate to *your* child's age and relevant to their interests. Simply watching a few of the challenges without completing the activity can be interesting in itself as it may give you some more ideas for great authors and reading books to recommend. Explore the site further to discover loads more free creative ideas.

