

Key Trouble



Written and illustrated
by pupils at St. Aloysius Primary School

The inspiration for this story came from a visit from one of the pupils' grandfathers. He told the group about some of the places and things he used to do as a child, and brought in some photographs and miniature trains for the pupils to look at.

After hearing Michael tell some stories, the class got to work on creating their own. They recapped some of the key characters, objects and places they had heard from the pupil's grandfather's visit, and then decided together what their story would be about. Once it was written, the class split into groups and each wrote out a section. Over the following weeks, the writing was developed and edited until the story was complete. A week of illustration workshops with Sarah followed, in which pupils worked with a range of media to bring their story to life.

From our perspective, Straeon generates representations of young people which counter those often associated with a stigmatised and negatively perceived area within Merthyr Tydfil. Gurnos has struggled with negative media portrayals which ignore the abundance of excellent community based activity and the proud, strong and creative people who live there.

The aim of the Representing Communities project is to explore how the arts and humanities can enable communities to develop, with artists, representations of themselves and their communities, speaking for policy and other decision-making audiences. We believe that Straeon is one example of how young people can flourish creatively and produce a high-quality example of children's fiction.

The project was devised by Jên Angharad, project manager for POSSIB, which is part of the Lottery-funded MAGNET project led by Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil.



Key Trouble

Once there was a girl who was visiting her grandfather's house. It was a terraced house down by the railway station and she went there as there were lots of interesting things and she loved to explore. One day she was upstairs in her grandfather's bedroom and in the top left-hand drawer of his chest of drawers she found some trains she had never seen before. She picked up a red and blue train and underneath was a shining silver key. She picked up the sparkling key and looked round to see if anyone was there and then she snuck it into her jeans pocket. She crept down the creaky stairs and quietly opened the door and then ran out into the street and sprinted along the path.

Suddenly she heard a plop coming from the sewer grate underneath her. She looked and the key was sinking into the dirty water.

"Oh no! My grandfather's going to go mad because without the key he won't be able to go to work and he'll lose money and it's all my fault!" What was she going to do? She struggled to lift the grate.

She looked down and said "I ain't goin' in there, I've already washed my hair!". Then she looked down into the blackness and thought she saw a rat's tail.

"This is going to be gross but here we go!" she said to herself. She held her nose and jumped.

The sewers were dark and the water was dirty and as slimy as a slimy snail. She crawled deeper and deeper into the sewers and it got darker and darker. Soon she could see. She looked at her clothes. "Oh no, my brand new jeans are all slimy and dirty. Now my mother's going to kill me. I want to get out of this sewer now! It's as dark as night and as dirty as a rubbish dump but I have to go on." She went on deeper and deeper into the sewers.

Then she saw light at the end of the darkness. She wondered what was out there. So she crawled to the end of the sewer and she felt better now that she was out.

"Oh, I'm at the blue pool. I was here in the summer with my friends and we had great fun in the water."

Then out of the corner of her eye she saw a glow and she thought it might be the key. She turned, but there was nothing. "This is strange" she said to herself. All of a sudden she saw it again but when she turned there was nothing there. She kept on turning and suddenly tripped over a rock and fell headfirst into the pool.



She was struggling for air and waving her arms, she shouted "Help!" The more she splashed the more she sank. She was panicking and thought she was going to die.

The water from the waterfall pushed her onto some rocks and she climbed onto a rock ledge. She slouched, panting on the rock. Then she heard a noise that was like snoring or coughing and she saw a large dark shadow on the cave wall to her right.

When the girl looked more closely she saw something sleeping on its side. Its hair was full of bugs, sticks and twigs and it smelled like an old sock that hadn't been washed for ten years. She looked more closely at the big shadowy figure and she saw wrinkly hair, big pointy ears.

“Oh No - it's a... it's a troll!”



She flinched and wanted to run away but then she stared because she saw something she had never expected to see. The troll had her grandfather's key in his mouth. It was resting against one of his teeth which looked rotten. This was because silver helps you get rid of your toothache because it's antibacterial.

As the girl reached for the key the troll slowly opened his eyes and when he saw her he growled.

"Don't move," she said, "I'm trying to help you".

She picked up the key in her hand and used it like a bottle opener to yank the troll's tooth out. The troll screamed and gently held his jaw.

"Thank you," he sighed.

The young girl looked at the tooth and now she knew why the troll had a toothache. The troll's tooth was swollen and black.

"Yuck!" she said and threw it into the Blue Pool. "Oh, no!" said the girl, staring at the water which was turning grey and gooey like a swamp.

"Look what you have done!" shouted the troll. "All the fish will die because the pool is polluted and I will starve and it's all your fault!"

"Calm down," said the girl "I'm really sorry. Will you ever forgive me?"

"Not until you help me get rid of the smell and get the fish back" replied the troll sternly.



"Okay, I promise. It's a deal" she said, offering her hand. The troll's huge hairy hand smothered the girl's in its grip.

"Now the water is all polluted and the only thing that can save it is the purest, cleanest ice which you can only find on the top of Snowdon".

"Where?" said the girl.

"Snowdon!" replied the troll. "It's the highest, coldest mountain in Wales."

"Oh, my grandad drives a train and he says that a train goes up to the top of Snowdon. Let's take the train there."

The next day the little black train chugged all the way to the top of Snowdon. One of the train drivers was shovelling the coal into the train as it heaved the carriages up the mountain.

The girl saw hikers walking up the mountain, pointing and taking pictures. When they got to the top they looked down and then realised how high up they were.



"Look down there. The buildings look like doll's houses" said the girl to the troll. "We're so high we can almost touch the clouds."

Slowly the train came to a halt and they jumped off. She could hear the wind howling as it blew her hair everywhere.

"Right!" said the troll. "We need to get up to the very top. But be careful because you might slip and fall all the way down. Come on, let's go!"

They searched and searched until finally the troll said "Oh look, there's a big block of ice right there. Quick, let's get it."

The troll and the girl rushed towards the block of ice and grabbed it while no one was looking. It was so cold that when they picked it up their fingers went numb and turned blue.



Then she heard a deafening roar. Suddenly out of nowhere another troll jumped out of the rocks.

"You!" yelled the troll from the blue pool. The trolls looked at each other in shock. "What are you doing here?" The two brothers were face to face and they stared at each other because they hadn't seen each other in years.

"Oh no, this is what I was afraid of" explained the troll from the pool. "We had a little misunderstanding about a girl many years ago. Well, actually, it was a big misunderstanding."

Then the two trolls started to fight each other. The girl didn't know what was going on, so she just hid behind the troll and screamed.

The troll from the pool pushed his brother and while he was off balance he whispered into the girl's ear "quickly, run back to the blue pool before the ice melts and it's gone for good!"



The girl ran as fast as she could all the way up to the train. Seconds later, the troll arrived.

"Oh no!" said the girl, "there's no more room in the carriages."

"Let's get on top!" said the troll.

"Are you mad?" said the girl.

"Just get on top!" said the troll, grabbing her and shoving her on top of the carriage and then jumping up himself.

Finally, the train pulled out. "Phew" said the girl, "now we can go back to the blue pool."

Suddenly, they heard a deep voice behind them. "Why don't you look behind you brother, you haven't got away with anything!" The troll from the mountain ran towards his brother and punched him across the face and they started fighting. They were running fast and jumping like kangaroos on top of the train. They were so furious with each other. They punched, kicked and hit each other like kick boxers in a ring. Their faces were smothered in blood and it was dripping all over the train's rooftop. The girl was watching from on top of the carriage. She was frightened and scared that she would get hurt.

"Stop, you're frightening me!" she shouted.

Suddenly the troll from the mountain stumbled and almost fell backwards off the train, but he brother stretched out his arm, grabbed his leg and pulled him back up. The two trolls sat on the train breathing heavily.

"Thank you" the troll from the mountain panted. "You saved my life".

"I couldn't let you fall. You're my brother."



The troll held his brother from the mountains in his arms as the train raced over the bridge. The girl was relieved that the fight was over and she stood up and walked towards them, held her arms out and put them around the trolls, beaming with joy. On the way down the mountain they laughed and screamed because of how fast the train was going.



Late that afternoon, the girl stood at the blue pool with the block of ice. It was as lovely as a shining diamond and it sparkled like twinkling stars in the midnight sky. The girl threw the block of ice into the pool and it hit the water with a splash. The water created a wave and soaked the trolls. Their faces turned from red to green as all the blood was washed away. The water transformed from a murky muddy mess to a beautiful, clear, tranquil pool.

Soon the fish were happily swimming around and the trolls were as happy as they could be. Now the girl could go home. She walked five steps to the path and she ran back to give them a hug.

"I'll always remember you" she said, wiping a tear from her eye.

The girl went to the terraced house where her grandfather lives. She had decided to tell him about the key. She knocked quietly at the door, worrying what her grandfather would think. The girl's grandfather opened the door and welcomed her in. When they got in the house the girl went up to him and said

"I'm very sorry I took the key without permission. I will never do it again."

They walked upstairs together and put the key back where it originally had been, and the girl slowly shut the drawer.







'Straeon' means 'tale' in Welsh. This is the tale of a girl who loses her grandfather's key, and her quest to find it and return it to him.

The story was created by year 4-5 pupils at St. Aloysius Primary School in Gurnos, Merthyr Tydfil. The class worked with storyteller and performer Michael Harvey for six weeks, and illustrator Sarah Edmonds on a one-week residency.

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