Sentifix: Sam at the Seaside
Bringing grammar to life
Consultant: Gill Matthews

Welcome to Sentifix!
Sentifix is a system of interlocking colour-coded bricks with stimulus materials that is ideal for teaching children about the way sentences are constructed as part of the process of learning to write.

What is Sentifix: Sam at the Seaside?
Sentifix is a simple system of tactile, interlocking bricks that feature pre-printed words or punctuation on all four facets. Different parts of speech are colour-coded so your pupils learn about essential grammar as they practise basic sentence construction.

How does it work?
- There are multiple choices of essential vocabulary, so several children can comfortably use the resource at once.
- There are blank bricks included to allow you to introduce new vocabulary and tailor lessons to individual pupils’ needs.
- There are 102 sentence-building bricks in all. The action all takes place in the familiar KS1 context of the beach – offering an opportunity for further cross-curricular learning.

Sentifix: Sam at the Seaside includes the following word bricks:

Nouns
- Includes: 110 bricks in total

Verbs
- Includes: 110 bricks in total

Determiners
- Includes: 104 bricks in total

Punctuation
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Connectives
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Prepositions
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Verbals
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Adjectives
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Adverbs
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

Adpositions
- Includes: 50 bricks in total

172 Sentence-building Bricks
They can talk, colour in high-quality, satisfying to interact... and above all, they allow children time to experiment with sentences before committing themselves with pen and paper. These word bricks are colour-coded by part of speech, so your pupils are learning about the way sentences are made every time they pick up a brick. Your pupils can choose from a range of nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, connectives, question words, determiners, pronouns and punctuation marks (question marks and full stops). Key vocabulary is featured on multiple bricks so several children can use the resources at the same time, and the words are printed on all four facets, of the brick so different options present themselves as a pupil turns the brick over. See previous page for a key to outlining which colour represents which part of speech.

18 A4 Sentence-building Picture Cards
Sentifix is a progressive, cumulative resource – the 18 A4 sentence-building picture cards are carefully levelled into three cumulative sets of six cards. These have been classroom trialled to allow for different ability levels at KS1. There’s also a cross-curricular element – whilst using these cards, children naturally reflect upon and talk about their own experiences of the beach. Why not ask them what we can find at the seaside and if they know how a day at the beach has changed in the last 100 years? You’ll find you’re covering Geography, Science and History all in one lesson!

An exciting A3 Build a Sentence Board Game
This pack A3 game is ideal for collaborative work and really absorbs your pupils as they have to play tactically to get the bricks they need (but reassured - essential vocabulary is featured on multiple bricks so all players have enough words at their fingertips). Suitable for 2-4 players and ideal as a diagnostic tool – you’ll see how your pupils are developing as they create their sentences.

So what exactly is in Sentifix: Sam at the Seaside?

How does Sentifix break things down?
Each part of speech is coded with a different colour to help pupils get the message that different types of words have different roles in sentences:

172 Sentence-building bricks

18 A4 Sentence-building Picture Cards

Two A3 Stimulus Scenes
These large format, colourful scenes are absolutely action-packed, so speaking and listening opportunities abound. They prompt lively discussions about real and imagined experiences, so that group work with Sentifix: Sam at the Seaside naturally leads to independent narrative, story and non-fiction writing opportunities.

An exciting A3 Build a Sentence Board Game

So, Sentifix is flexible but not prescriptive.

The resources are ideal for group work and also independent work, and easily accessible for a teacher or Teaching Assistant (step-by-step notes are featured on the reverse of all card resources).

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What does it take to develop a resource like Sentifix?

Making sure Sentifix is an effective, child-friendly resource that was instantly manageable by busy teachers must have been a fascinating task. Ellen Simpson, Philip & Tacey’s Marketing Manager talked to Gill Matthews about the development phases of this exciting new development in teaching grammar for writing.

How did the idea for Sentifix come about?

Gill, Philip & Tacey’s New Product Development Manager, Polly Barnett approached me after shaping-up the 12 new ‘brand’ resources based on colour-coded word bricks that interlock. We looked very carefully at how it could really benefit to a classroom and it soon became clear that to be more aligned to reading than writing and the speaking and listening elements were present too.

With a whole dictionary of vocabulary to choose from, how on earth did you limit Sentifix’s scope?

Gill: We started off looking at high frequency words list from the NLS Framework, but those words are really more aligned to reading than writing and the speaking and listening elements were present too.

“It was having the theme that cracked it.”

So how does all this help my pupils learn to write?

1. The process
When you use Sentifix in your classroom you avoid putting children on the spot:
   - First, they look at a stimulus picture that they can relate to.
   - Then think about a sentence they could make, experimenting with different word bricks (some of which feature different forms of the same verb).
   - Next, they are ready to try to build a sentence with the bricks and discuss it with an adult or peer.
   - And when you think they are ready, they can have a go at writing it themselves.

All these represent vital steps in the process of learning to write that can be easily overlooked. Each one helps familiarise children with grammar as their writing skills develop, without putting pen to paper until the child is ready.

2. The hands-on approach
Children revel in the opportunity for kinesthetic learning that Sentifix’ Sam at the Seaside offers. They’re constructing sentences without having to put pen to paper – a boost to any young writer’s confidence.

3. The characters in the setting
Sam’s parents, Buster their dog and Sam’s playmates are a lively bunch of characters. The events depicted in the cleverly drawn illustrations by Sue King mirror the sort of childhood experiences (like dropping an ice cream) that KS1 children will remember and relate to and talk about and therefore be inclined to write about. Sentifix Sam at the Seaside is the first of a series of packs that use themes that are commonly covered at KS1, so the work will fit in with and consolidate work that you are doing across the curriculum.

4. Value for money
And last, but not least – Sentifix Sam at the Seaside, with 172 cubes and a range of high quality support materials including teacher’s notes from Gill Matthews, offers your team an unbeatable value for money.

An INSET day with Gill Matthews

Gill offers school or LfA-based professional development training. These extremely popular and effective ‘ready-made’ sessions reflect her particular areas of interest and expertise – non-fiction, improving writing standards and cross-curricular teaching. They include:

- Developing a literacy-based thematic curriculum
- SATs attack – preparing for KS2 SATs
- Developing a Year 6 Booster programme
- Spotlight on... children’s authors for KS2
- Improving progression in non-fiction writing in Years 3 to 6
- The effective use of picture books in KS2
- I’ve got to do guided reading (for KS2 teaching assistants)

Gill is currently preparing courses on using multimedia texts in KS1 and KS2. Details will soon be available on her website.

INSET days tailored to meet specific requirements are also available.

Please contact Gill via her website at: www.philipandtacey.co.uk or call her direct on 01905 821634 to discuss your school’s needs.

An interview with Gill Matthews

Polly Barnett:

“Sentifix gives children the confidence to experiment with sentence building without putting pencil to paper.”

And why did you choose ‘At the Seaside’ as your theme?

Gill: In part, because it’s a theme children often cover at KS1 – two QCA schemes of work take the seaside as their focus – Geography and History. Even if a child has not been to the beach, the notion of the seaside is entrenched in many cultures. It’s also a context that naturally lends itself to active and fun scenes that can house a lot of detail. Children (now looking at busy pictures) look at the success of ‘Where’s Wally?’ and the beach context provides us with a lot of scope for language development.

The picture cards, games and stimulus scenes are an important part of the resource then?

Gill: Yes, because they offer an opportunity for collaboration with other children and adults. Children are talking about what they see, the sentences they are building, and the game they are playing – this is language development as part of a natural process. There is no blank page to fill – in its place there’s the readiness to make a meaningful sentence and the tools to make it grammatically accurate.

So how will you tie any future editions in with this set?

Gill: We felt it was important to have recognisable characters that children can relate to, so Sam and the other characters will feature in any future expansions, and they’ll still be up to mischief, no doubt!

Is Sentifix just for KS1 Pupils?

Gill: You can use it for KS2 special needs teaching. Sue King’s Illustrations are deliberately amusing and cartoon-like – not babyish. We’ve kept Sam’s age ambiguous intentionally so KS2 pupils won’t look at the resources and say ‘That’s too young for me.’

Finally, what’s the magic of Sentifix over any other grammar resource?

Gill: Sentifix gives children the confidence to experiment with sentence building without putting pencil to paper. First, they look at a stimulus scene or picture, then talk about it and then think about a sentence they could make. Next, they experiment with different options and finally there’s a sentence they are happy with. All these are essential steps in the process of learning to write and it is instrumental.

Tell us what you’d like next and win a FREE Sentifix set!

Every Sentifix theme is carefully chosen to be in line with what you tell us you are teaching at KS1. If you have an idea for a theme that you think teachers would like to see as a Sentifix set, email your New Product Development team with suggestions on polly.barnett@philipandtacey.co.uk or write to: Place the matting in! St Mary’s, North Way, Andover, SP11 5BA. All ideas will be considered and placed in a draw to win a FREE Sentifix set!

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