

ur a gd mn mr gum ;-)

Everyone loves bending and breaking the traditional rules of expression – playing with language, or “mucking about” with it as Andy Stanton says (as we’ve seen, he mucks about rather more creatively than most).

So I’m surprised that Andy doesn’t like textspeak. When the internet arrived, one of the first things users did was to muck about with language – making up new words, playing with punctuation, adding special symbols and so on. The same thing happened with text-messaging, eventually leading to text-message poetry competitions (‘write a poem on your phone in 160 characters’) and text-message novels (downloaded a chapter a day).

Many myths have grown up around the practice. Parents are worried that textspeak is full of new-fangled abbreviations, and that the kids who use them don’t know how to spell. In fact, research has shown their fears to be unfounded. No more than ten percent of the words in a text are abbreviated. And as for

new-fangled, replacing ‘you’ with ‘u’ isn’t new. Queen Victoria and Lewis Carroll used to play rebus games (like TV’s *Catchphrase*), and Christmas annuals have always contained word-substitution puzzles (Y Y U R Y Y U B I C U R Y Y 4 me – ‘too wise you are...’)

As for ‘texters can’t spell’, ask a group of kids why they omit certain letters and they’ll say “because it’s a cool thing to do”. But they have to know the letters are there in the first place to be able to leave them out. You can’t text well if you can’t spell, and the best texters turn out to be the best spellers.

So the more your children text, the more practice in reading and writing they get and, as confirmed by the latest research, the better they’ll do in reading tests. ■

