



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH GARY SHEPPARD

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

I genuinely can't remember what I read when I was younger, although there is one story which was indirectly very influential on me - The Wizard of Oz. I played the Cowardly Lion in a play at primary school and that remains one of my most vivid memories. The storytelling is so unique; the memorable characters, the purity of the storyline, the epic landscapes - a genuine journey of the imagination. It also remains one of my favourite films of all time. I don't think it's necessarily influenced my writing, but I think it's certainly given me an insight into the power of storytelling.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

I can't pinpoint a particular moment when I realised I wanted to become an author, but looking back on my life there's always been a love of writing and wordplay running through it. Even as far back as primary school I would write epic adventures that I'd never finish as I'd run out of time!

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

For me, it's something that feels effortless and timeless. It doesn't feel contrived or clinically put together to serve a purpose; it gives you a feeling that it's been written or drawn from the heart and for the love of it, not just to pay the bills (even if it has!). As someone who loves to write in rhyme, it's vital that the lines flow seamlessly with no potential stumbling blocks for the reader. When rhyme is done well, think Donaldson and Dahl, it's incredibly effective and memorable. If it's poorly executed it detracts from the story.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

Absolutely not. I wouldn't ever restrict myself or stifle an idea by tailoring it for a specific audience. If you have an idea, run with it. Ultimately it'll find its own audience.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

Unfortunately, and I'm happy to be proved wrong, but I think it's inevitable that electronic books will eventually replace their physical counterparts. Unless something dramatic happens, I can only see the way people consume and experience culture, whether that's music, films or books, becoming more and more digestible and convenient. I'm certain that view will be opposed by traditionalists, but I think the notion of having to hold a book and literally turn every page will diminish with each passing generation. And of course, as with most technology, the opportunities are actually exciting. A picture book 'read' through a virtual reality headset, for example, could offer an extraordinarily exciting and immersive proposition - imagine turning your head and exploring the surroundings and interacting with characters.

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

Given my love of words, I very rarely read books, let alone collect them. I always feel envious of bookworms who constantly have their head in a good book, but it's just not for me unfortunately. I guess I'm much more of a writer than a reader. Having said that, I do have a good collection of picture books, some of which have inspired me to raise my game and given me a level to aspire to, and some that have, to put it politely, convinced me that if they can do it, so can I.