



HANNAH MARKS

The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Hannah Marks

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

I can remember when I was very young I absolutely loved *The Hungry Caterpillar*; I would follow the caterpillar through the holes with my finger over and over again. Another favourite was *Brambly Hedge*; I found the interiors of the animals' homes fascinating and would 'walk' up the stairs with - yes you guessed it - my fingers. There's a theme evolving here!

Q2. What inspired you to become an illustrator?

I kind of gradually fell into it by accident. I'd had some commissions as a graphic designer, but was feeling unfulfilled by it. With three kids we'd always had dozens of children's books laying around the house, and at some point - probably about the time our youngest was three - I started to dabble with some illustrations for my own amusement. My husband saw my early efforts and encouraged me to keep at it. I set up a Twitter account and began following other illustrators, building up contacts, some of which grew into friendships offline, and eventually plucked up the courage to show some of my own work. I went to a panel event at Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford and at the end nervously showed my work to Professor Martin Salisbury who said he'd be totally honest and wouldn't pull his punches (as a self-taught illustrator with no formal training I half-expected to be ripped to shreds!), but his criticisms were immensely constructive and a huge morale boost to keep going.

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

It has to engage its target audience from the moment they see it. A children's book is doubly difficult because it has to work on two levels; not only does it have to appeal to children, but also to the adults who'll be pestered into buying it, and who have the task of having to read it over and over and over again.

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

See my previous answer! When I'm given the text of a new children's book it's always in the back of my mind that not only do I need to engage a child's attention so they'll want to turn the next page, but how to add nuance and in-jokes that the adult reading the book will get and enjoy too.

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

I think that perhaps the future of novels for the adult and YA markets is in the digital format - it's just so convenient. However children's picture books are a much more tactile experience and I believe that physically holding the book and turning the page creates a better connection between the child and the story. Of course artwork of any kind always looks better in a physical format in front of you than reproduced on a screen - that's why we still go to museums and galleries!

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

Yes I am! I've kept loads of our children's old picture books now they've all grown out of them, but I also have my own collection of books including some vintage first editions of Sasek's 'This Is...' series - I'm working towards owning the entire original run! My favourite book changes from time-to-time and currently my favourites are by Marc Boutavant.