



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH JO COTTERILL

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

My father always read to us while my brother and I were in the bath. Ivor the Engine, the Just So Stories, poetry, Dr Seuss...my earliest memories are not of reading but of being read to. Which is curious because I learned to read very early indeed – at the age of 3 – with an unusual ability to remember the meaning of any word I asked about. So from a very early age I devoured books. As a child I loved The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, and also the Little House on the Prairie books. Slightly older, I became obsessed with Susan Cooper's The Dark Is Rising sequence, and Anne of Green Gables.

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

It wasn't my childhood ambition to write books. I wanted to be an illustrator for many years, and then when I was thirteen I fell in love with the theatre and so I went to study performing arts at university, followed by several years in touring theatre productions. When I couldn't get acting work, I felt creatively frustrated, so I took to writing to fulfil that side of me. I did a correspondence writing course and gradually realised that I was completely hooked!

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

For me, personally, it's all about character. I have to really connect with the character: they have to be real to me. They don't have to be likeable, but I have to believe in them and want them to 'make it'.

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

Yes – but only in terms of age. When writing for children, I think it's important to know roughly the age of your audience. The needs and abilities of an eight-year-old are different from a fourteen-year-old. Beyond that – no. I don't write 'for girls' or 'for boys'. I write for young people at specific points in their lives.

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

For children, never. You can't give a small child a Kindle; it's not the same experience at all. And people love to give books as presents. A book is a thing to be treasured and read over and over; to have a place on your bookshelf where you can retreat or explore as need be. I think there are areas where e-books are dominating over print: crime, romance, erotica, text books – but where children's books are concerned, there is no question in my mind that print books will remain.

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

I'm not a collector in that sense of the word...I have a LOT of books! But I don't buy beautiful editions of things. I'm not a great collector of objects that are simply to be looked at and admired rather than used. It's what's inside the cover that matters: the story is all. There are so many wonderful, special books out there, I'm just happy to dive in and swim among them!