



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH KIT DE WAAL

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

I grew up in a house where the only book was the Bible, so I've read that at least twice, cover to cover. Not a bad exercise in the English language, actually! I read Shakespeare and Dickens at school but I really started reading voraciously after my misspent youth, and for years I only read classics. When I studied for my creative writing Master's, I got more into modern literature. My favourite book is *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguru. It's perfect. I remember when I got to the last few pages, I had to close it because I simply couldn't bear to be present for the end. It's exquisitely understated and if ever there was a book I wish I had written, this is it.

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

I wanted to be a journalist when I was about fifteen but had no idea that I could write fiction. It was when I was home with the children when they were small that I really faced up to my desire to write. Then it was just a question of going for it! I think most big readers have a secret longing to put pen to paper. More people should do it. I'm involved in several initiatives to help aspiring writers from marginalised communities get published, like my scholarship at Birkbeck and Penguin's Write Now. We need to get more diverse voices out there.

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

A compelling story, well-written, that opens my eyes to an experience I haven't had or a corner of life nobody has shone a light on before. Tales of the extraordinary things ordinary

people do. Absolutely everyone has something unique to them, some heart break, secret, special skill, yearning, great joy, some desperation.

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

I've found my readers are usually open-minded and just love a good story. One the great things about the last year, since the launch of my first novel *My Name is Leon*, is that I've had the chance to meet lots of my readers. Now I know who you are!

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 it was Stephen Fry who said the elevator never replaced stairs but works alongside them. Physical books are becoming more like prized possessions nowadays. At the first BAMB Readers Awards this year, there was a special prize for the most beautiful book. People often use both, with an e-reader for travelling and shelves at home still stuffed with precious volumes.

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

Yup, I'm one of those people with overflowing shelves and piles of books by my bed. One of the best things about being a writer is that people keep sending you books for free. If anyone feels like sending me a signed first edition of *The Remains of the Day*, I'd love to add that to my collection!