



## The Letterpress Project

### Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

# An Interview With Leila Rasheed

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

I grew up in Libya so my earliest memories are of reading while lying on my stomach in a patch of warm North African sunlight on a cool, tiled floor. My mother would generally be calling me for lunch and I would be ignoring her. I used to tear off corners of pages and eat them, I remember they were creamy-yellowish and tasted slightly salty. The physicality of books is a strong memory; the spine cracking when they were read and re-read, the creases in the cover (usually the corners) making white lines across characters' faces, the smell of glue and the discovery that books were stitched together with thread.

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

Reading. I used to act out stories all the time, with a cast of teddies. One day it occurred to me that if I wrote these stories down they would last *forever*. I remember the feeling of being on the brink of a thrilling cliff: do I dare? Later on in life I realised that writing was the only thing that made me happy, so it made sense to do it as much as possible.

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

If it achieves what it sets out to do convincingly, I consider it successful. I don't see the point in comparing *Crime and Punishment* to *Bridget Jones' Diary*; there is room in the world for all kinds of literature. I never differentiated between 'literary' and 'commercial' when I was a child; children don't, and that's what drew me to writing for children specifically. Children just want a good story, well told and worth thinking about after they put the book down. Adults sometimes think a book can't be any good if it makes you laugh.

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

I always start with myself. But part of learning to write for children is learning to recognise when a story idea that presents itself to you is right for YA, or teen, or 9 – 12, etc. I think

you learn to recognise this from reading widely and from trial and error. It's not precisely writing *for* a specific age group, as understanding how to best shape your ideas.

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

No, I don't think it will. I think they will co-exist. For some purposes, electronic books are much better than physical books. For others, they are much worse. For example, in children's picture books it is important to have a book where a number of senses are being stimulated and more complex movements encouraged. Electronic books are really limited in the different kinds of engagement they can create (at the end of the day you're just tipping, waving, pressing, swiping, etc. all on the same small grey slab) and they are just not suitable for younger children to use for a long period of time. Nothing replaces reality, not even virtual reality and I am sure this is why so many people are consciously turning away from screens and towards practices like blacksmithing and baking – ways to engage with real, handmade, crafted objects. On the other hand, electronic books definitely have a place. I personally use them for books I need to read but know I won't re-read. And of course it's brilliant to be able to take an e-reader on holiday.

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

I used to be, but now I'm trying to cut down. We don't have space. I'm not bothered by first editions, signatures etc., all the celebrity element around books. I like books if they mean something to me personally. I treasure my copy of *The White Deer* by James Thurber and my copy of *The Kingdom Under the Sea* by Joan Aiken because these were books that I loved as a child, which were lost in a suitcase when we came back from Libya and which I finally managed to track down again as a teenager, by searching second-hand bookshops, long before Amazon!

Thank you very much for taking time to do this for us. We will advise you when we publish it on the website - [www.letterpressproject.co.uk](http://www.letterpressproject.co.uk). Please return the completed interview to:

**Karen Argent**

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