



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHELLE ROBINSON

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

We couldn't afford that many books so I read the same ones over and over. 'Ping the Duck', 'Clifford the Big Red Dog' and a load of Ladybird classics. We also borrowed books from the library and I went digging around in second hand shops for anything by Enid Blyton.

My dad used to make up brilliant stories about a caveman and my gran used to read us poetry. She would sit us on her knee and read 'Wynken, Blynken and Nod' by firelight. I would look at the illustration, marvel at the lines on my gran's face, wonder if she was secretly Mary Poppins, gaze into the flames and dream.

I still love being read aloud to. Some of that magic from my childhood is conjured up every time. I'm a big fan of audio books.

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

Reading! And my dad telling me I could do anything I wanted in life as long as I worked hard. I used to love the Garden Gang books which were created by a nine year old girl. I used to think, 'If she can do it, so can I'.

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

That impossible-to-put-your-finger-on magic that goes on between just the right words, just the right pictures and just the right the reader.

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

I think about what age range the idea is appropriate for. That gives me a guide on word count and language. Generally I try to write something that will be enjoyable for children

and the grown ups reading with them. I guess I'm always thinking, 'This person may have had a very bad day. Give them a little dose of good cheer'.

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

A very healthy one, particularly when it comes to picture books. Interestingly one of my publishers (one of 'the big three') used to create e-book versions of their picture books as standard. They've stopped bothering because the numbers didn't stack up - people just aren't buying picture books in digital form, they're buying real books.

The physical book is already a perfectly evolved piece of technology. To a small child, page turning is an act of very real magic. For older children, book ownership equals knowledge, power and independence. And how much more attractive do adults reading books look compared to people sucked into their screens?

I'm not anti-digital books, but they're not for me. Story is king. Humans are storytellers and the story is what matters, not the vehicle that delivers it and ultimately not the industry built around it. I will always love nosing at other people's bookshelves and spending time working on mine. You can't curate a Kindle.

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

I mostly collect picture books which isn't easy - they're so big and are often irregularly sized. I really like the Penguin clothbound classics and am sneaking in the odd one or two every birthday. If only I could sneak in a few extra birthdays without ageing... If I could own one particular book it would probably be something like a first edition of 'Charlotte's Web'.