



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this series of Letterpress Project e-interviews that we are undertaking over the coming months. The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative that exists to promote the value and pleasures of the physical book and we are keen to get the thoughts of authors and book illustrators about their own influences, experiences and love of books. We are happy for you to make your answers as long or as brief as you are comfortable with and we will undertake not to edit or paraphrase any of your comments without your explicit permission.

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

My very earliest memories are of picture books being read to me. I can remember *The Hungry Caterpillar* and *Funnybones*, and being scared by *Where The Wild Things Are*. As I grew up, I didn't do much reading myself – I enjoyed my Year 5 teacher reading us *The Hobbit*, and listening to *The Indian in the Cupboard* a couple of years earlier, but I was far more into playing computer games than reading. Books seemed too much like work to me. Then *Harry Potter* came out, and it changed everything.

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

The main inspiration was reading *Harry Potter*. I devoured the first two books, but it was the third that made me see for the first time that books could be just as good – if not better – than computer games and movies. The series had everything I could possibly want, from fantastic villains to magical creatures and spells and mind-boggling sweets. Experiencing that transformation, going from someone who hated reading to someone who waited for the postman to bring the next *Harry Potter* book and then spent the entire day reading, is what made me want to be an author.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book?

I'm still a very reluctant reader to this day, so for me the most important mark of a successful book is that the first line, the first page, the first chapter is well written and exciting enough that it draws me in. It has to hook me, asking questions that it can then answer later in a nice, satisfying manner. There are loads of books that I've stopped reading

quite quickly just because they didn't grab me in this way. Then, after the final page is done, it has to linger; it has to make me think and remember and dwell on what I've just experienced. For me that's what makes a successful book – that one-two punch of a good opening and a good ending. The opening gets me reading, while the ending makes me remember it long after the final page is turned.

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

I do! Me, when I was 11 years old. I still remember so clearly what it was like. I remember what I didn't like about books, what I loved, what made me want to turn the pages. So I write for that version of me, and hope that if I can make something that he would enjoy, then, hopefully, I'm on to something. I think I feel quite attached to that 11-12 year old audience because that's the age I was when I truly discovered the magic of books, and now I get to try to give that feeling to other kids.

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

I don't think the electronic book can ever replace the physical book completely. I remember Neil Gaiman talking about a conversation he had with Douglas Adams, once. Douglas Adams said that books are sharks. Sharks have been around for a very long time. There were sharks before there were dinosaurs, but sharks are still around because there is nothing better at being a shark than a shark. I love that metaphor, and it's so true. Ebooks are great for their immediacy and convenience – I can think, oh, I'd like to read that, and have it in my hands in seconds – but they don't have the heft or the smell or the feel of a real book.

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

Not actively, not a proper collection, but I do love having a packed bookshelf, so perhaps that's almost the same thing. It's pretty special to have some signed books from friends who are also published, and I'm particularly proud of the signed books I have from the authors who inspired me when I first started writing. I have Skellig signed by David Almond, and The Graveyard Book signed by Neil Gaiman. The only thing missing is a signed Harry Potter... maybe one day!

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. Please return the completed interview to:

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