



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Erika McGann

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

Our house was full of books when I was growing up – two walls of our sitting room were books, and there were bookshelves in every bedroom – so there was always something to read at home. When we were smaller we were read to every night before bed, and when we got older we were allowed time to read ourselves before going to sleep.

There were so many books that I loved at that time, but the ones that stand out are the *Narnia* books for adventure, the *Worst Witch* books for fun, and the *Lavender* books by June Considine, which were my introduction to horror.

Above all, though, was Roald Dahl. I reread his books constantly as a kid, and I still do now. There's still nothing quite like curling up with a well-worn copy of *Matilda* or *The Witches* for some cosy reading.

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

My parents were very supportive of any artistic efforts we made as kids – they never showed any concern for those of us heading for less financially secure jobs! Instead, I remember getting beautiful notebooks to write in and even, at one point, being bribed with 10p pieces to write new stories. So I have to credit my parents with inspiring a writing career very early on.

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

Anything you can get lost in. That sounds a bit vague, but I love any book that I can sink into to the point where the real world disappears around me – a book in which the characters feel real and the world is so well described you can just plonk yourself right into it. That, and a plot that moves along at a great pace, make a great book.

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

Yes. When writing for kids you're aiming for a particular reading level, so you have to consider things like vocabulary, word count and suitable subject matter. Once I'm settled into a reading level and genre for a book, I don't try to narrow the audience any more than that.

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 ebooks will ever fully replace physical books – they are different reading experiences. E-readers are useful when travelling, for reading giant tomes that you just can't carry around, and for reading multiple versions of manuscripts (including my own), but printed books feel like the genuine article. When I read for enjoyment I want to feel the paper copy in my hands; I want a book that doesn't need charging, one that gets old and weather-worn the more it's read. That's what a real book feels like to me.

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

I am not a book collector. I loved having walls of books in the house when I was a kid, but now I feel that any books left on my shelf are just gathering dust. When I'm done with a book I like to give it away – let someone else read it.

I rarely reread books, but those that I do I hang on to. I am a sucker for beautiful editions of the classics with lovely hardback covers, and I have a few of those, but only those that I know I'll read again. Everything else I let go, to be enjoyed by somebody else.