

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

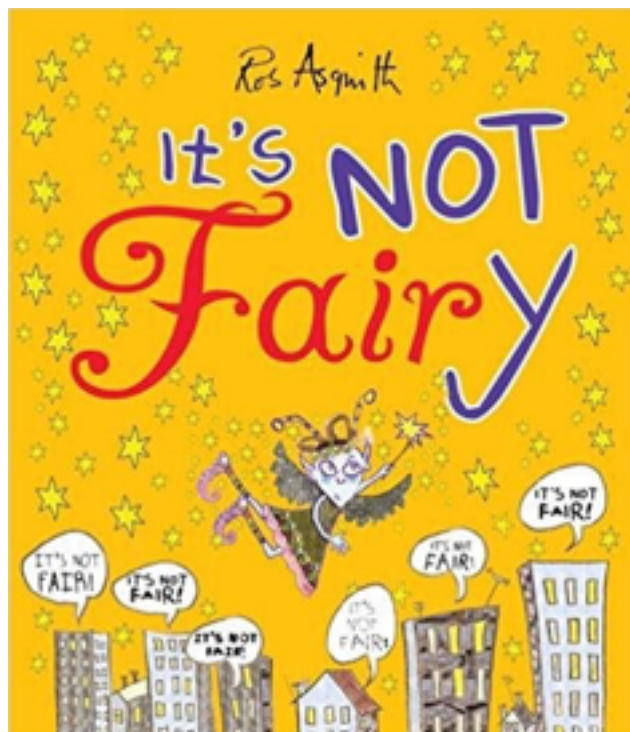
Aged five, my favourite books were Enid Blyton's Noddy with living toys! Eat your heart out *Toy Story*. I graduated to Blyton's Famous Five, admiring tomboy George, sparky, unlike what I perceived as 'soppy' girls. I called myself Jim or Tonto. Sorry, but that was the only name I knew for an Apache warrior. My two brothers tied me to a tree as a captive indian while they skedad-dled off being cowboys. I've identified with the injuns ever since.

I devoured anything about horses and had a stash of comics, notably 'Superman' and 'The Beano', whose Bash Street Kids inspired generations of cartoonists. Other favourites were E E Nesbitt's 'Five Children and It', CS Lewis' Narnia series and 'Alice in Wonderland' with its inspiring Tenniel drawings, both beautiful *and* funny, a combination I'd still like to master. I liked Edward Lear, a cartoonist in words, like Dr Seuss. If I were a publisher I'd print his works individually as picture books.

I also loved Fairy tales, particularly the Andrew Lang versions with romantic illustrations by HJ Ford. As Lang himself reminds us, most modern fairy tales are weedy versions of the originals:

'These fairies try to be funny, and fail; or they try to preach, and succeed. Real fairies never preach or talk slang.'

Oh dear. I am guilty of writing a slangy preachy fairy myself. Must improve.



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

I never distinguished between words and pictures. Both were ways of telling stories which I pursued from the age of seven. I made poems, comics and even created a magazine written for -and by- horses, featuring (apologies) 'Horsoscopes' and a handsome "Stallion of the Month." I started off passionate, writing about injustice, but people seemed bored so I made jokes about injustice instead. It never occurred to me that this might become my job and I am immensely lucky that it did.

"Paid to play," is what I say.

"Stare at the paper till your forehead bleeds" is what Douglas Adams says.



My drawing age 7 of Sebastian the caterpillar experiencing prejudice.....

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

Detail. Simplicity. Soul. The greatest books, I suspect, are those into which their creators have poured their deepest thoughts and feelings . Never mind if it's about a bear or a barbarian. It has to ring true. A tall order.
But there's also fairy dust, which makes a book magic and you can't always say why.

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

In some cultures, it's rude to discuss anyone's age. There are simply children, or adults. I would even question that distinction. I started off writing the 'Teenage Worrier' series for teens, but really I was writing for the girl I used to be and the adult I had become. I found that adolescents (who, after all, are only old children, or young adults) had changed little since I was their age. I got letters from all over the world confirming that teenage worries are eternal.

My drawings for Mary Hoffman's "Great Big Books" series, should transcend any age gap and be enjoyed by everyone.

A perfect example of a work that crosses class, culture, gender and generation to speak to us all is Shaun Tan's 'The Arrival'.

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

Unlikely. It's so nice flipping pages. Books should be loved, not venerated. I fold down corners, spill coffee, scribble notes in them and read ebooks only on holidays. Children who I read with prefer real books too, so although that may change, it won't be any time soon.

But audio books are great, because although you can't write while you read, you *can* listen while you draw.



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

I vow to have fewer books. I won't re-read most of them. They are dusty. BUT. I give them away . And buy new ones.

I keep books written or illustrated by friends. I will never throw away "War and Peace" or "Middle March" or "A Fine Balance" or... or..... Or anything drawn by Edmund Dulac, Quentin Blake, Posy Simmonds, Ronald Searle or.... the list goes on. And on.

A special book? All of the above. I'll never get rid of them.

Woe is me.