

## An Interview With Mary Hoffman

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

**A1. Oh so many! I had two older sisters (7 and 11 years older than me) and was always nagging them to read to me. In the end I taught myself to read before I went to school, from the headlines in my father's newspaper. My mother realised what was going on and bought me a horrible brown reading primer, which I hated and rejected. Thus began my dislike of reading schemes. My favourite books were Alison Uttley's Sam Pig and Sally stories, Worzel Gummidge, Mary Plain and anything by Enid Blyton. I do not admire the last any more. Then at 9 or 10, I discovered and devoured The Lord of the Rings and re-read it every year till I went to university. I have re-read it several times since but find the style very unattractive now, though I still love the characters and superlative world-building.**

**Q2. What inspired you to become an author?**

**A2. I never use the word "inspiration" and nor does any other writer I know. It's simply not like that. It's more like a compulsion, a need to get something out of your brain that is demanding to be released.**

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

**A3. (I'm taking this to mean a book by me.) One thing I know is that it has nothing to do with how easy or difficult it was to write. It has to do with how close the finished work is to the book I envisaged when I began planning it. The closer to that, the more successful I think it is. This has nothing to do with a book's commercial or critical success by the way. But there is never complete congruence between the two – or one would never write another book.**

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

**A4. I think a reader who is in some way like me. A patient, experienced reader, who is not daunted by complex and literary novels, someone who knows that a series of violent or shocking episodes is not the same thing as a plot. In picture**

books I suppose I am writing for an emerging reader who likes books to be fun and magical and interesting, with a text worth reading more than once.

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

**A6. I have a Kindle and a house full of shelves groaning with books. I love having the feeling on holiday with a Kindle that I will never run out of something to read, or becoming "bookrupt", a term coined by my daughter Rhiannon Lassiter, who is also a published writer, when she was a teenager. I think the two meet different needs. I read Wolf Hall on the Kindle because I was travelling up and down to London on the coach a lot at the time and didn't want to take in my bag the heavy hardback I gave my husband. But I read Bring up the Bodies in bed at night in hardback. Then read them both again as ebooks on holiday in Mexico. It's just a question of which is more convenient at the time. There is some evidence that paper books are now selling more again and I don't think the physical book will ever die.**

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

**A6. See above. We both have massive libraries. I don't care about first editions though so I'm not a book collector, in that sense. I hate rarity value applied to anything, but especially books. No; I think as a compulsive book buyer that if there was a book I wanted, I'd get it. Oh, I'd like to own the sequel to The Crimson Petal and the White but Michel Faber says he's not going to write one!**