



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Muhammad Khan

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

I was fifteen when I came across a dusty old copy of Rice Without Rain in my high school library. It was the moment I realised Asian people could appear in books – ridiculous right? And yet, till that moment I had only come across white protagonists and occasionally black. To see yourself reflected in fiction is incredibly powerful for a child. I began to see myself and my life experiences as something that mattered.

Minfong Ho's main characters are usually unassuming girls who go on to make heroic decisions. I'm pretty sure her books inspired the creation of Muzna from I Am Thunder.

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

Writing is not that far removed from play and all children love to play make believe. I was four years old when I created my first book. It was a story about three sister witches. My older sister was so impressed she asked me to explain what was going on in each picture and wrote it underneath, getting me to copy out the words. From that moment forward, I have never stopped writing.

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

Relatable characters and an irresistible inciting incident that spurs them on an adventure. I think the best books have characters who become very different people than they started out as. It makes the book meaningful.

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

I am a high school maths teacher and I love the company of teenagers because they are so honest and open-minded and cool! Writing for them is second nature to me, plus they give me instant feedback which is a huge bonus!

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

Holding a physical book in your hands is like hugging a friend. Would you prefer a virtual hug or a real one? For me there is no competition and a huge plus is displaying your beautiful new friend on a book shelf!

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

My family were never wealthy so buying books has always been a bit of a luxury. That being said I formed a modest collection from charity shops and ex-library copies. The kids at my school know I love books and often give them to me as gifts. A lovely Year 11 girl recently gave me a mind-blowing special edition book set of Tolkien's works. I nearly cried!