



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Joseph Coelho

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

I recall being obsessed with a copy of *The Cat In The Hat* and was always very impressed by the way the cat could create havoc and then turn everything back to normal as if it had never happened. I didn't like the fish, the fish ruins all the fun.

I was also a big fan of Annuals. I had *Rupert The Bear* and *The Beano* and *Whizzer* and *Chips* a highlight of every Christmas was knowing that I would be getting some more annuals to add to my collection.

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

Other authors and poets inspired me. I was really taken by the work of Lemn Sissay when I first ventured out into the world of performance poetry. Lemn's *Work* has such vibrancy and honesty and I love how he effortlessly walks the line between writing and performance. Something that I myself have tried to do by writing, producing and performing in plays that I have toured nationally. In those early poetry days I was very fortunate to be around a community of wonderful writers including Jacob Sam La Rose and Francesca Beard and Malika Booker and Aoife Mannix all wonderful writers who set the standard and showed me what was possible.

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

One that a reader can totally believe in whether that's 'world creation' or the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Essentially it is about truth and how well the writing and illustrations give the reader an insight into a truth.

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

Specific in terms of age range and ensuring it's appropriate to the age but other than that not really, good stories are for everyone even young and old alike. The best stories transcend any audience classification.

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

This was a concern quite a few years ago but the markets have shown that the physical book isn't going anywhere partly because in response to the rise of digital media publishers have focused on the tactile nature of books. There are many more beautiful books out in the world with sprayed edged and embossed covers (like mine and Fiona Lumbers Luna Loves Library Day) or even sparkling fold out full colour covers and end pages like mine and Freya Harta's Fairytales Gone Bad Zombierella. I was so pleased when Otter-Barry Books decided to make my latest YA Verse novel /story told in poems - The Girl Who Became A Tree into a gorgeous hardback complete with Kate Milner's wonderful poetic illustrations. I felt that it was a decision that really honoured the story I was trying to tell and made for a beautiful book to hold in the hands something that I hope will make a great gift for many people.

Ebooks are of course still around and I for one love them there is something wonderful about being able to carry a library around with you in your back pocket and for that practical ease of use ebooks are brilliant, but they will never replace the smell of pages recently thumbed.

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

I have far too many books and in fact recently donated 300 odd to Oxfam, but I'm already replacing them. I love collecting books I have a few old ones from the early 1900s with gorgeous full colour prints including Alice in Wonder Land, The Water Babies and The Pirates of Penzance. There is a pop-up version of Alice in Wonderland that I have had my eye on for a while – but I need to find the right place to display it, it's not the kind of book you can keep closed.

