



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interview

An Interview with Jonathan Emmett

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

All of the picture books I fell in love with as a child were borrowed from the local library. The building is long gone, but I remember it well. The children's section was on a mezzanine level overlooking the rest of the library. It was like being up on the battlements of a castle, surrounded by books.

My favourite childhood read – and a huge inspiration for my own picture books – was *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. As an adult I can appreciate that it's beautifully illustrated with a deftly written text that reads wonderfully aloud, but as a four-year-old it was the sheer nightmarish scariness of the Wild Things, with their “terrible roars”, “terrible teeth”, “terrible eyes” and “terrible claws” that drew me in. Their wildness was in stark contrast to the tameness of most other picture books then and now. The book was criticised by parents and withheld from libraries for being “too dark” when it was first published, but that darkness has proved to be hugely appealing to many children.

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

I've enjoyed making up stories and playing with words for as long as I can remember, but it didn't occur to me that I might do it for a living until I was a teenager. I was a big fan of Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* books and I idolised Adams in the same way that my friends idolised rock stars or football players. Adams first found fame as a radio script writer and a lot of the storytellers that inspire me - like Jim Henson or George Lucas – come from other media.

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

There is no set formula; a book that one reader finds totally engaging can be a complete turn off for another reader. Any book that can engage directly with the reader's interests and enthusiasms is a 'successful book' for that particular reader.

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

I nearly always write for myself or the child I used to be. If I don't like what I write, then it's difficult to work up the motivation to finish it.

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

I think there's room for both. I have a few science books in e-book format and the search function is great for finding specific references quickly. However I don't think e-readers can match the physical appeal of a real book.

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

My family own thousands of books, but I don't consider myself to be a collector. That said, I'd love to own a first edition copy of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* if anyone has one going spare.

You can find out more about Jonathan Emmett's books at his website scribblestreet.co.uk