

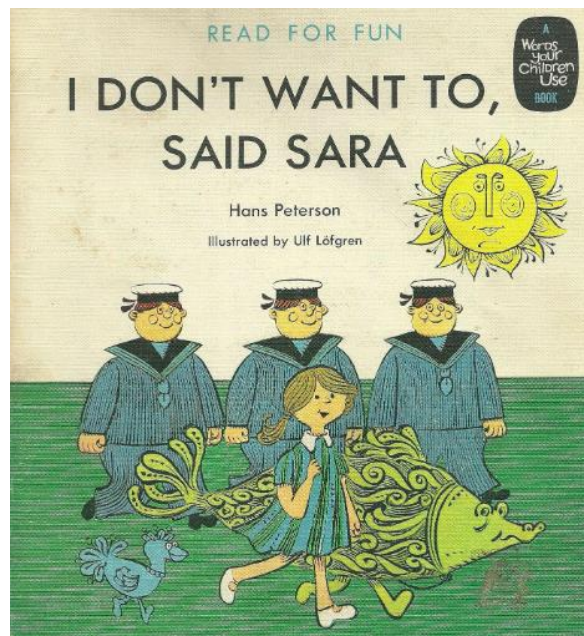
The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An interview with Sarah Hewitt

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

Books have been part of my life for as long as I can remember - my mum read with me every day. I was born in 1966, so classic Ladybird books such as 'Ned The lonely Donkey', 'Five Little Kittens' and 'Nick the Disobedient Puppy' come to mind. On my sixth birthday a classmate bought me 'I Don't Want to said Sara' by Hans Peterson, illustrated by Ulf Lofgren. It made such an impression on me because I was a quiet, compliant child and Sara, my namesake, was very assertive (and sometimes a bit naughty!) I was also fascinated by the illustrations and their rather mysterious, evocative style. This book was one of the inspirations for my latest picture book 'Anna's Garden' in which the main character is also a very assertive little girl.



Read here by Sophie Harris:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib9mq2TBBNU>

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

Just like reading, creating stories and drawing pictures have always been with me. My grandfather loved to draw, and I have many happy memories of sitting with him and creating pictures together. He was the inspiration for my first published picture book 'Grandad'.



The most inspirational experience of my life was studying for the Children's Book Illustration MA at Cambridge School of Art when I was 46! What I learned there transformed a hobby into a passion. There were so many highlights, but sitting next to Axel Scheffler as he described his process and holding a 'Gruffalo' original illustration in my hands must be one of the best!

[Sarah's Sketchbook](#) tells the story of my journey to become a picture book creator.

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

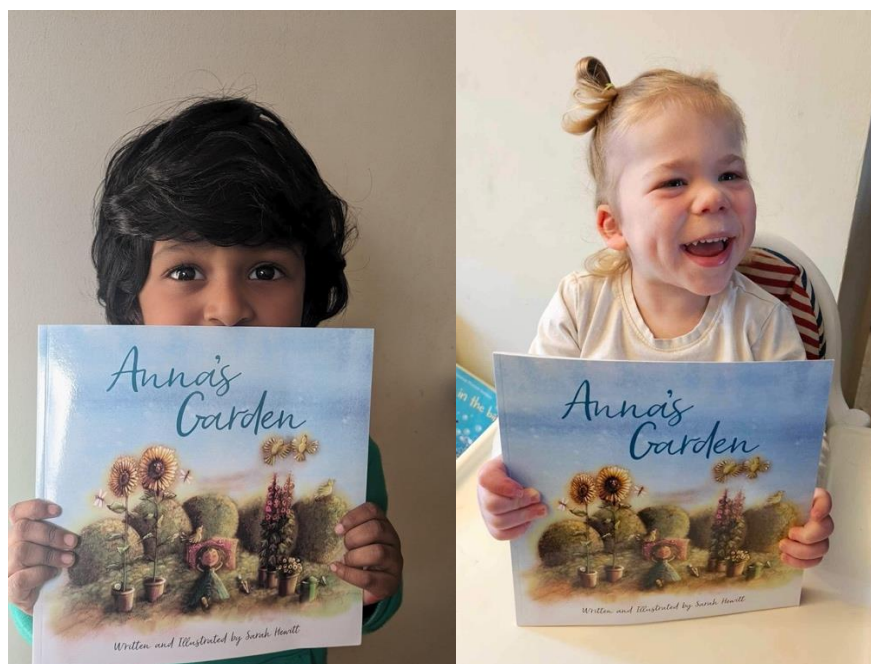
There is an 'X' factor that some author/illustrators just have - it's that little bit of magic that shouts to a child "Read Me!". I think the most successful children's books are created by people who never stop inhabiting the mind of a child, and who are passionate about what they do. My hero, the inimitable Shirley Hughes once described the delight of drawing as 'the nearest thing I know to flying into the sun'. A successful book is one that stays in the memories of a child for a lifetime.

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

Some of my books have a particular audience in mind, for example 'Grandad' is for children who have lost a loved one. 'Anna's Garden' on the other hand, is dedicated to 'all little children everywhere'. Identifying the age of the children you are writing and illustrating for is of course vitally important, and remembering yourself at a particular age can help you to empathise with your intended audience and your characters. When I am drawing a character, I often imagine myself in the same situation and realise that I am imitating the expression on their face as I draw!

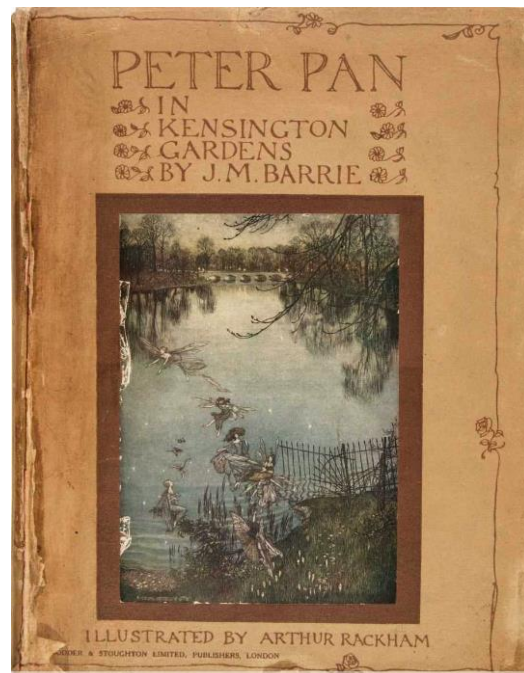
Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

I have worked in educational publishing for over 20 years and during that time have seen a gradual movement towards digital books (accelerated during the pandemic). For the educational market I can see a time when physical books are no longer required - it is quite exciting because it will mean that as the world's knowledge grows more and more rapidly, textbooks can keep up. I don't think the physical book will ever truly disappear in the trade publishing world though - there's something rather comforting about turning the pages in a well-loved book and passing it on enthusiastically to another reader. I also believe that books as beautiful objects will always exist. I relish the 'hands on' process of making the first physical dummy book of a new picture book and there's nothing like holding the first printed copy of a labour of love, or seeing it in the hands of a little person for the first time.



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

I'm not a collector, but my husband is an auctioneer, so we have some beautiful old books at home. If I could own just one sumptuous picture book of pure joy, it would be Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens by JM Barrie, illustrated by the great Arthur Rackham.



Thank you for asking me to be a part of The Letterpress Project Author and Illustrator E-Interviews – it's been a real treat to talk about why I love being a children's book author/illustrator.