

EDITORIAL ISSUE 36

THE NEW CHILDREN'S LAUREATE



Perhaps it goes without saying – but I'll say it anyway – it's a very great privilege to be the Children's Laureate and I'd like to thank everyone who has helped me get to a point where it was thought I'd be right for the job. The post itself is developing into an exciting voice for children's books, thanks to Quentin, Anne, Michael and Jacqueline. I can see that they each brought a particular focus to their laureateships and they've each left a legacy for children and children's literature to enjoy. This has set me thinking about what kinds of specialist interest I might bring to the post.

A large part of my life has been taken up with writing, performing and anthologising poetry for children so I'm especially keen to find ways to celebrate the diversity of poetry both from the past and now. I think this is particularly important in the light of some big changes that have happened to the world of children's poetry in the last few years. It's my view that one consequence of the way in which poetry is now being taught in schools is that any given poem is now seen as an example or type. The work that flows from this tends towards a kind of trainspotting, where children are rewarded for having identified this or that feature of the poem. In tandem with this, children are being asked to write poetry either in imitation of the poem that they've dealt with in this way, or by following formulae or prompts. Assisting and supporting all this, the circulation of poetry is getting choked up with themed and targeted anthologies and text books.

My view is that poetry for young children has first and foremost to be felt and enjoyed. Poetry is a suggestive, reflective art form. It mostly tries to avoid cut and dried messages and conclusions. Poems are not sequences of facts. They are more like streams of suggestion with under- and cross-currents. The activities that we invent in relation to poetry should be to support children's explorations of the feeling of poetry and its ways of creating reverberations and resonances with our experiences. This means I'd like to look at the environments we create for poetry, the kinds of questions we ask about poems (why should we ever ask a child a question about a poem for which we already know the answer?!), and the relations we can build between poems and art, music, drama and dance.

Because poetry uses tone and register of voice, it is also a key way in which writers can place themselves, personally and culturally. This makes for it being incredibly diverse in structure, feeling and culture. It provides a perfect meeting place for attitudes, feelings and cultures to collide and fertilise each other. I look forward to finding ways in which this can be celebrated, involving, I hope, the internet, performance venues, libraries and of course schools.

I also spend a good deal of time running workshops or teaching on a Masters course covering such matters as how our pleasure of reading connects to the way in which we make books matter to us. So, it follows from this, I will do all I can to encourage reading for pleasure and making books matter.

www.michaelrosen.co.uk



We are grateful to Orion Children's Books for their help with the front cover of this issue.

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