



Photo of Julia Donaldson by Chris Watts.

EDITORIAL ISSUE 48

I feel excited and honoured to be the new Children's Laureate and to be following in the footsteps of Anthony Browne and his predecessors, all of whom are heroes of mine. It's been hard keeping it a secret and I think friends have been wondering why I have been alternately wearing a grin of delight and a frown of impending responsibility.

The few people who have been allowed into the secret have been asking, "What will your big thing be?" I don't know yet whether I will have one major project, but two of my great passions are for drama and music.

Having come to book-writing via song-writing, I often write in verse, and the sound of the words is as important to me as their sense. I've always enjoyed performing my own stories and songs, and have observed how most children also love acting and singing, which do wonders for their self-confidence. At this year's Edinburgh Book Festival I will be doing an event with two other writers where we will help ten-year-olds to dramatise our stories and then perform them to younger children. I hope to do more such events, and also to encourage children to write their own songs and playscripts.

Another area I plan to involve myself in is stories for deaf children. This is partly because I have a hearing problem myself, and also because I'm fascinated by sign language (even though I've never learnt it) and love to watch stories being acted out so expressively by signers.

I will also be vociferous in the campaign to promote libraries and halt the cuts and closures which as I see as so damaging to our children and their future. I'm proud to be the first laureate based in Scotland, and am kicking off with a visit to Whithorn Library which is celebrating its hundredth anniversary but is under the axe.

The six previous laureates have done so many good things, and I want to make sure that I keep these alive. Just one example is Anne Fine's "My Home Library" initiative, where children can print out book plates designed by their favourite illustrators.

So drama, music, stories for deaf children, libraries, and continuity – these feel at present like my "big things"; and they're all linked to the "biggest thing" of all – the pleasure and richness to be gained from reading. I toyed with an extra paragraph but instead will finish with a poem which I hope will express my feelings better:

I opened a book and in I strode.
Now nobody can find me.
I've left my chair, my house, my road,
My town and my world behind me.

I'm wearing the cloak, I've slipped on the ring,
I've swallowed the magic potion.
I've fought with a dragon, dined with a king
And dived in a bottomless ocean.

I opened a book and made some friends.
I shared their tears and laughter
And followed their road with its bumps and bends
To the happily ever after.

I finished my book and out I came.
The cloak can no longer hide me.
My chair and my house are just the same,
But I have a book inside me.

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