



Cressida Cowell Children's Laureate 2019 ? 2021

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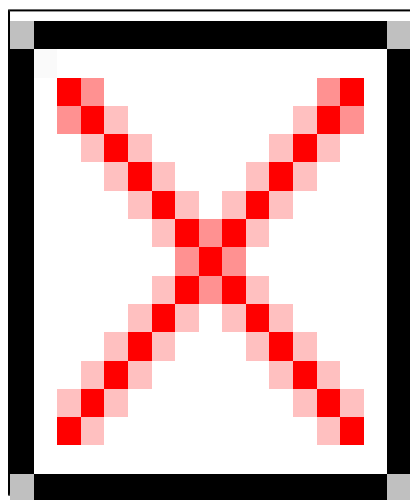
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Byline:

The new **Children's Laureate Cressida Cowell** shares her plans with **Nicholas Tucker**

The new Children's Laureate talks to Nicholas Tucker about her plans.



Cressida Cowell is an excellent choice for the next **Children's Laureate**. As British and international fans of her **How to Train Your Dragon** series along with so much other fiction will already know, she writes exciting adventure stories accompanied by jokey line illustrations sprawling happily over the page. Her young characters are basic survivors in the face of a variety of dangers always more comic than truly threatening. There is an infectious enthusiasm to everything she does, whether writing, illustrating or addressing school audiences where she always goes down a storm.

So my first question to her in her new role was has she got one big plan for the next two years or lots of little plans

?Lots of big plans! I've got a ten point to-do list; it's called the **Cressida Cowell Waterstones Children's Laureate Charter**. One of its main points is to encourage all children to be creative for at least fifteen minutes every week when they can write just for the joy of it in a special book which the teacher is not allowed to mark. This is in response to so many parents telling me that their kids have stopped enjoying writing. So I am going to press for a weekly creative space where they can write just for fun. I have already started a campaign I've called **Free Writing Fridays**, and I would now hope to build on this.?

How are you going to get schools to co-operate?

?Well I can't force them! But fifteen minutes isn't very long, so I really would hope that many of them could find time for an initiative like this despite everything else going on in the classroom. And for the last five years I have been involved in the **Wicked Young Writers** scheme, where children send in wonderful stuff they have written themselves about anything they like. So I know the talent and interest is there; it's simply a matter of finding time for it. Many teachers have written to me saying how much their pupils had enjoyed getting involved with this particular scheme. There is also a personal note here. When I was at school I was often scolded for bad hand writing and sloppy spelling. It

was only when one teacher encouraged me to put down whatever I wanted to without any fear of criticism that I first started writing just for the love of it, and have been doing so ever since!?

How about getting children to read as well as write?

?I still remember every book a teacher ever read to me. And going round schools, which I do a lot, there are still those teachers who are finding time to read aloud and are getting such good responses from their classes. The same goes for parents reading to their children at home. I have always been a great supporter of **BookTrust's Time to Read** campaign. I don't do pessimism! So I shall do all I can to support reading at school and at home and just hope that enough people will take it up from there. There's also the excellent **Summer Reading Challenge**, which I already support and I will try to give as much publicity to it as I can. As **Laureate** it is important to support campaigns that are going already as well as imitating ones of my own. Summer is an obvious time to get children reading as there is no school for over a month.?

What about own your summer holidays? By the sound of it you are going to have so much to do.

?Luckily I'm already doing a lot of stuff, so I am quite prepared. So I'm going to all the festivals and I'm on the board of **World Book Day**. I'm also ambassador for the **National Literacy Trust**. I'm almost certainly going to do more, but I'm already quite used to much of it. And it's so worth it! At the **Seven Stories** centre in Newcastle the other day I was doing things and one kid said to me, ?This is the best day of my life!? Isn't that wonderful? Here we are in 2019 and the best day in this kid's life was meeting an author!?

What about your own writing? Will you still be able to get on with it?

?Well, let's see! I'm definitely planning on keeping writing. But of course there will be lots of other things to do as well. But it is a wonderful job and it's a great honour to have it.?

Cressida now has to go to another meeting. Dedicated, enthusiastic, energetic and almost bursting with good ideas, she should make an absolutely splendid Laureate. We are lucky to have her.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

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