



# Guest editorial by Sian Williams of the Children's Bookshow

Article Author:

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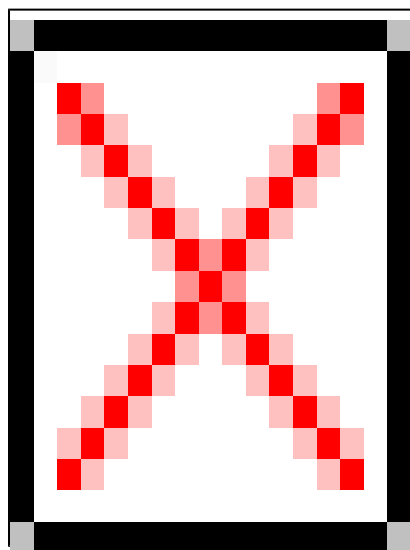
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**Guest Editorial by Children's Bookshow founder Sian Williams**

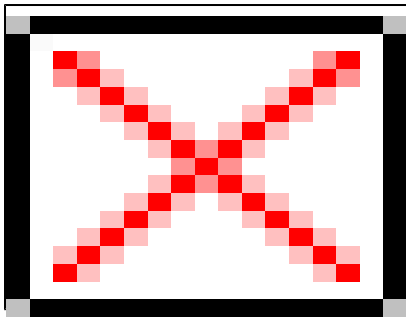
*'If we don't offer children the experience of literature from other languages, we're starving them.'* Philip Pullman



**The Children's Bookshow** invites some of the best writers and illustrators of children's literature from around the world to visit theatres across England and present their work to audiences of children and their teachers.

Their presentations take wildly different forms: in Michael Rosen's case for example, it's an hour of his inimitable monologues, a brilliant zany mix of poetry, riddles, family anecdotes and jokes. For an award-winning illustrator and writer like Catherine Rayner, it will consist of storytelling, using a power point to display her beautiful picture books, some live drawing - always a huge hit with our audiences - and lots of audience participation.

Over the years, we've worked with some of the most celebrated artists from the UK and abroad, ranging from the late greats Eva Ibbotson, Judith Kerr and John Burningham, to Quentin Blake and Michael Foreman. We find the wonderful new arrivals on the children's literature scene too: Alexis Deacon, Benji Davies, Jo Empson, David Litchfield, just to name a handful.



In addition to their performances, the artists also go into four schools in the area and run workshops for children focusing on their own creative work. There's an added bonus for these lucky children: the Bookshow gives each child free a signed copy of one of the artist's books to take home and keep. The result this has is heart-warming: 'The children's response to the performance was one of total awe and inspiration. Children from some very challenged backgrounds in Birkenhead were so excited to read that they were reading their books on the way back to school. Priceless.' (Feedback from St Werburgh's Primary, Birkenhead.)

Every year, when planning the autumn performances, we target towns and cities with areas of high levels of deprivation (not difficult to locate currently), and 80% of our audiences are drawn from these areas. We do this because we firmly believe that every child should have the opportunity of being presented with the joy of great children's literature. We try to make a balance between visiting large conurbations like London and Manchester and smaller towns such as Ipswich or Hereford, where we visit schools in the surrounding rural areas. We also like to collaborate with literary festivals, in order to increase the impact of our work, and work regularly, for example, with the Manchester and Ilkley Literature festivals.

To make the maximum impact in large cities, we work with prestigious venues such as the Old Vic in London and the Theatre Royal in Newcastle. For most children, the enchantment begins as soon as they step inside the red velvet and gilt interiors: a beautiful theatre's auditorium alone is quite eye-opening for the majority! It all makes for a memorably wonderful experience. We also try to pair with other venues which will have an impact: in 2018's Bookshow for example, we paired with the bookshop at **Tate Modern** for a hands on event for tots with our Russian illustrator participant Victoria Semykina, and with Quentin Blake's **House of Illustration** for a talk for adults by Japanese author and illustrator Satoshi Kitamura.

Most importantly, we continue to give more books away each year, not simply to the children lucky enough to have a workshop, but also to the entire audience of some of the theatres we visit. This has been made possible with the generous support of the Unwin Trust.

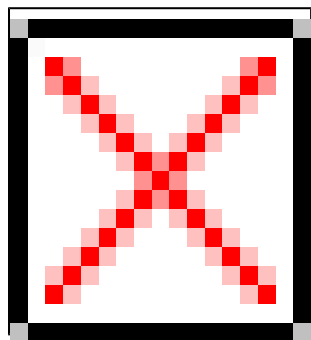
I'm often asked why we invite such a large proportion, 25% currently, of our artists from abroad. The seeds were sown as a child. Growing up with a Welsh-speaking father, I was lucky enough to hear another language spoken. In addition, aged about eight, and having discovered the existence of something called Plaid Cymru, I asked my father why he didn't vote for them? His quick response was, 'Because I'm an internationalist, love, not a nationalist.' Small wonder that I went on to study Russian and French at university, learned Italian as an adult and now translate books from Italian.

We've been enormously privileged to have been able to welcome international greats such as Tomi Ungerer, Satoshi Kitamura, Kitty Crowther, Grégoire Solotareff, François Place, Francesco D'Adamo, Daniel Pennac, Anushka Ravishankar, Gitte Spee to name only a few, to our tour. This autumn we'll have in the mix Maria Parr from Norway, Dutch Gijs Van Der Hammen and Hanneke Siemensma from Holland, Catharina Valckx who is also Dutch but writes in French, having been brought up in Paris; and Jon Agee from the USA, who's published by the enterprising new kid on the block, Scallywag Press, together with Chinese Guo Yue with his wife and co-author Clare Farrow.

Philip Pullman once famously wrote, 'If we don't offer children the experience of literature from other languages, we're starving them. It's as simple as that.' Given the current climate of increasing xenophobia, it's more urgent than ever to offer children the best literature from around the world. And what choices we then have!

You can help us to bring the joy of reading to over 10,000 children across the country this year [by supporting us](#) [3].

[Visit the website](#) [4] for details of the **2019 Children's Bookshow**.



Sian Williams

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