



All hail the new Children's Laureate

Article Author:

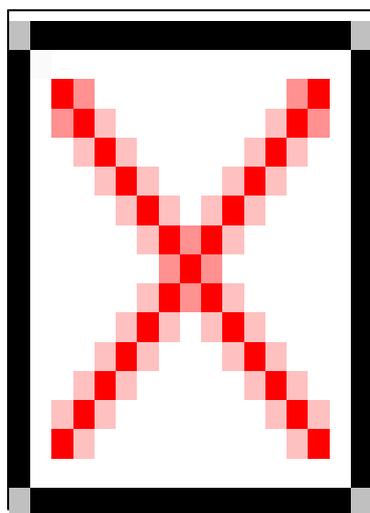
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Byline:

An interview with **Lauren Child**

Nicholas Tucker talks to **Lauren Child** about her plans for her years in office as the **Waterstones Children's Laureate**.



Lauren Child is the 10th

Waterstones Children's Laureate. I am talking to her about this in the foyer of London's Langham Hotel. Her love of different materials plus her ability to go for just the right detail and colour in her illustrations is reflected as always in the elegance of her appearance. So what are her major plans for the next two years? Is she going to concentrate on illustration, texts or both together?

Both. But I have always drawn since I was a child, and I still don't think book illustration is considered seriously enough as an art form in its own right. I would like to do something about that. Think of Ernest Shepherd's A.A. Milne illustrations! Other illustrations at the time could have been so sentimental but his are minimalist and never in the least cloying. Or consider the huge contribution Quentin Blake's illustrations made to Roald Dahl's popularity. We normally look at illustrations as an accompaniment to a text. But viewing them separately, as I was doing the other day at an exhibition of David McKee's work, is a reminder of how very good they can also be as individual works of art.

So when you talk to children as Laureate are you going to tell them to go away and write, draw, or create their own picture book and do both?

Go away and stare out of the window! Go and collect ideas and try something! Just recently on walks with my daughter I have been taking photographs of those funny little things you can always see outside once you are looking out for them. Children are constantly asking me 'Where do you get your ideas from?' I think it's more a case of 'Where don't you get your ideas from?' I intend to go further with such photos on my website, both by me and I hope from children sending in their own efforts as well.

Are you going to do a lot of travelling?

I hope not. I would rather follow the example of Quentin Blake when he was Laureate. This was not to spend his time visiting schools all over Britain but to have a series of open meetings and discussions about ideas and creativity with people both from the world of books but also from films and comedy who have over the years influenced me and others as readers, writers and illustrators. And I would also like to raise the issue of boredom, and how potentially creative it can be. Because the only way to get out of boredom is to do something, and allowing ourselves to experience boredom for a while could also eventually prove to be the stimulus for starting out on some sort of creativity.

But isn't trying to re-fashion boredom into a potentially positive state of mind going to be hard?

IPhones and so on are brilliant things, but I just want to children to realise that they don't have to be on them all the time. You don't always need to be entertained. There is always the possibility of finding that creative thing within you, or else going out even if it's just for a few minutes and simply registering what you can see. The other day I had to sit in a hospital waiting room for four hours before being seen for something I was worried about at the time but which is OK now. I went there in a hurry without a book or anything else. So with nothing to do I found a pen and started writing something that has since turned out to be interesting enough to be included in my next book. How glad I was that because I did not have my phone with me I was forced to use my time so much better. But I don't want to impose another extra activity on children that they may not want to do. I would rather offer them some encouragement to get off their phones sometimes and then leave the rest up to them.

So how do you feel about becoming the new Children's Laureate?

When they first asked me my first reaction was, Gosh, I don't know if I could do that. But once I had talked about it with others I began to get some ideas and now I feel very excited about it. I want to go on working too ? I have just finished one book and after that will start on a new one. I know I will be interrupted a lot of the time, but since I have had a daughter I have got quite used to that anyhow!

It is always such a pleasure talking to Lauren and her way of combining proper seriousness with intervals of loud laughter. Supported by her brilliant press secretary Phil Perry, she should be quite an act over the next two years. This is an excellent appointment.

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

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