

## Exclusive Q&A with CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal Winner Emily Gravett



### What inspired the story and illustrations of *Cyril & Pat*?

Cyril started as a doodle, but it was my sister talking about grey squirrels being vermin (and just rats with tails) that made me want to write a book about a relationship between a squirrel and a rat. I felt that they would make fantastic friends with their similar cheeky fun-loving personalities, and that they would have a lot in common. I was interested in how that friendship would be viewed from the outside.

### Do you think the idea of prejudice and friendship needs to be explored more for children books?

To be honest, when I start a book, I don't really think about the theme behind it in such a structured way. I just started with a squirrel and a rat, and then explored what might happen if they were put in the same place. It wasn't until the

book was largely written that I noticed what it was about. I think children's books do and should cover every theme under the sun, and there are many that explore both prejudice and friendship. My preference is for books that explore subjects without being too didactic, and leave some areas open for discussion so the child is free to form their own opinions.

### Your Instagram feed shows lots of doodles, do you find that these help your thought process while creating characters for your books and how do you use them?

I've always doodled, but I don't doodle in a purposely constructive manner. There is often a theme, but it is usually just whatever is on my mind (TV/worries etc) or related to what I'm working on. Some of my doodles have later developed into characters (Cyril definitely came from a series of squirrel doodles), but they don't consciously start off trying to be anything. I think that the difference between a sketch and a doodle is that a sketch is a purposeful exploration, whereas a doodle is a subconscious ramble. As different as a dream, and a day dream!

### *Cyril & Pat* is largely set in a park, was there a park you had in mind when you created the scenery?

A lot of parks here in the UK were created in the Victorian era, so are quite similar in layout to my childhood local park with their beautiful mature trees and duck ponds. The park in *Cyril and Pat* is mostly my old childhood park, but I've taken a few liberties for ease of drawing!

### Tell us a bit about your artistic process?

Everything starts off in my sketchbook. I always use the same (square) sketchbooks that I've bought since I was a student (a creature of habit). Nothing else feels quite right. I use watercolours, pencils, wax crayons, or anything that will give whatever effect I'm after. I'm a big believer in cheating, and if there is a shortcut I will take it. For example, I sometimes make prints using a lino cut, but I only own red ink, so change the colour in photoshop once I've scanned the print in! Photoshop is my friend, and I use it to collage my hand-drawn work together with the text, backgrounds and any other element I want on the page. At the start of each book I make however many blank spreads I need in photoshop, and then gradually fill them up as the book proceeds.

### Where's your studio and describe it... how often do you like to work there and are there any quirks to it that help your practice?

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I work in my studio every week day, but hardly ever on a weekend. I realised a few years ago, that however lovely your job is you need to do something different for a couple of days a week, or life gets a bit samey.

I'm lucky enough to have a room in my house that I can use exclusively as a studio, although when we have guests, I get turfed out! My partner Mik built a whole wall of shelves for me to store books in (now very overcrowded) and a drop-down bed (for the guests) which when folded up onto the wall can be used as a magnetised pin board. My desk is built into the bay window, and isn't quite big enough, although I suspect that however big a desk I had, I would still be working in towers of paper and pencils.

### **What's your favourite children's book of all time and why?**

I absolutely love John Vernon Lord's Giant Jam Sandwich. It was my favourite as a child, and still has the power to transport me back to childhood when I see it now. It is one of the reasons I love picture books. When you are a child, the feeling of being in that moment with the book is so intense, but slowly forgotten as you grow. It is magical to re-experience that feeling with your own children.

### **What is your daily working routine?**

I get up at 7am, and in lieu of a commute, I take the dog out for an hour or so. By the time I'm home, washed and at my desk, it's normally about 9am. I work until 12, when hunger forces me downstairs for lunch then depending on deadlines, enthusiasm, or energy I either go back to work, or have an hour to do other stuff (sleep/read/garden etc) Afterwards I work until about 5 when dinner's ready (I know- we eat ridiculously early, but we are HUNGRY) then I work (or try to work) until 7-ish.

I'm a bit of a slave to routine, which isn't always that productive. I'm a terrible procrastinator and spend far too much time googling things and making tea.

*Emily Gravett*

## An Interview With Cyril & Pat Described By Emily Gravett

**Question: What are the three words that best describe you?**

CYRIL: Nutty, Fluffy, Sweet

PAT: Funny, Brave, Clever

**Question: What is your greatest fear?**

CYRIL: Getting caught by a dog.

PAT: I'm not scared of ANYTHING

**Question: What is your favourite snack?**

CYRIL: I love a nice nut or two.

PAT. Ha Ha, Cyril you *are* a nut! Chips are SO much nicer than nuts

**Question: What is your favourite colour?**

CYRIL: What a silly question. GREY is obviously the best colour

PAT: YUP. I agree with that!

**Question: How do you relax?**

CYRIL: By having a laugh.

PAT: I relax in a nice warm tray of chips or noodles.

**Question: What would your super power be?**

CYRIL: Easy! I'd like to fly. Just imagine if there were flying squirrels. . .

PAT: Cyril- I think you need to look up 'flying squirrels'. My super power would be to grow REALLY big. We wouldn't get chased by dogs then!

**Question: What is your most treasured possession?**

CYRIL: It *was* my skateboard . . . but it broke.

PAT: I have an extensive collection of old sandwiches. Some of them have even gone a little bit furry, but that just makes them prettier and more interesting.

**Question: Are you an early bird or a night owl?**

CYRIL: Birds are up early catching worms, so if I'm up too, I can surprise them. BOO!

PAT: I'm a bit of a Rat about town, so I like to be up late hanging round bins just in case something good gets thrown in.

