

Simon Philip – Q&A with the author

Q. How do you get the ideas for your books?

This is the question I get asked most often, but actually find quite difficult to answer. I'm not always sure where my ideas come from. Very, very occasionally they pop fully formed into my head, but it's rarely that simple or easy.

I don't have a formula as such for coming up with new ideas, but there are a few things I do when I need inspiration, particularly for picture books. I try to get myself in the right mindset and immerse myself in the world of picture books by reading those that I already own, or ones I've borrowed from the library, which often helps to spark completely unrelated ideas in my mind. I sometimes flick through newspapers for unusual or entertaining articles or photographs that could, with a bit of imagination, be turned into a great story. Sometimes an overheard phrase can provide inspiration, as can a single thought, which can turn into a good opening line or title. The idea for *I Really Want the Cake* came about because that exact sentence popped into my head one afternoon (I was probably craving cake, as usual) and it immediately struck me as being a good title and starting point for a story that almost everyone can relate to.

Q. Why did you want to write this book?

It seemed only fair and natural to me that the little girl from *I Really Want The Cake* should have a few more adventures, especially as Lucia endowed her with such a strong personality through her beautiful, expressive illustrations!

Although she's not based on a particular person, the girl in the story certainly shares a few (perhaps too many) of my personality traits, and for that reason her 'voice' came quite naturally. That definitely makes it easier to write from her point of view, even though – believe it or not – I'm not a six year-old girl. Once we (Lucia, myself, and our brilliant editor Katie Haworth at Templar) had decided on the concept of a book about wanting and trying to win, I was able to imagine really clearly just how our character would feel and behave in that exact situation.

Hopefully it's another story that children (and adults) will be able to relate to, and I think the messages about dealing with disappointment, winning and losing graciously, and trying to enjoy the pursuit whilst chasing goals are useful to bear in mind – for everyone, at every stage in life!

Q. What is your favourite children's book? Both right now and when you were a child. Why?

Weirdly, despite enjoying being read to frequently, I remember very few books from my early childhood – though classics such as *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, a wonderful book, naturally spring to mind. Choosing a favourite is far too difficult, anyway. I do love Jon Klassen's *This Is Not My Hat*, for its beautiful, effective illustrations and brilliantly sparse, deadpan text. The relationship between the pictures and the words is picture book genius. There are loads of others I love – far too many to mention.

Q. Why are books important to you?

For the escapism, excitement, comfort and lessons that they can provide. Because of the joy and intimacy of being read to as a child, and the pleasure that writing them now gives me. For the opportunities that books – whether through reading or writing them – can proffer. For what they represent, generally. And also because they – particularly illustrated books – are beautiful objects in their own right.

Q. Are there any key influences on your work/the book?

I think the key influence for *I Really Want To Win* is simply my own experience. Those feelings of disappointment that come with not quite getting the thing you've strived so hard for, and frustration at your own inadequacies or those of your performance, are ones I'm familiar with. I think every child can relate to them, but also adults, too. I'm often guilty of ignoring my own advice from the book – it's all too easy to focus on the goal, rather than enjoying the journey of trying to reach it. Particularly when playing golf.

Q. What do you hope young readers take from the book?

Really, I just hope that they enjoy it – whether through the pictures, the words, or both, on their own or alongside someone else.

If I'm lucky, I hope they might take away the idea that it's important to always try their best but, equally, to enjoy themselves whilst doing so. That it's good to be gracious in victory and defeat.

And, if I'm really, really lucky, a love of language, reading and picture books!