

Q1. You create your books jointly, who does what and how does the process work?

Mick: We always work on it together from the very beginning - I usually begin the text and Brita has an input in that. We then make the rough concept thumbnails and may adjust the text at that point to focus better with a specific image or layout idea we have. When we go to artwork we share the illustrations depending on what the subject and voice might be - but it is flexible and we often take turns on the same sheet of collage or watercolour paper. But after 24 years we sort of know what we will do and trust each other not to mess up our partner's hours of careful work!

Q2. How did this book come about?

Brita: It was initially a commission from the British Library. They took us, and our publisher Janetta Otter-Barry, on a guided tour of the store rooms underground. When we got to a huge bomb proof door I asked if we could go in! Even the tour guide hadn't been in, but they rang someone and that someone said yes'. Two keys opened the nuclear bomb-proof vault and inside we found Aladdin's cave; Shakespeare's First Folios, Caxton's Chaucer. We were allowed to handle them too, so after that how could we say no?!

Q3. What was it like doing the research?

Brita: It was very exciting and fascinating but very hard to make the shortlist as the amount of pages were already decided by our publisher. Getting everything into the book felt like trying to fit into Cinderella's slipper. We chose books that children would find fascinating such as Beowulf and hopefully some things that are not so well known. The BL supplied high res images of our shortlist and we then went to work bringing the titles and their authors to life.

Q4. What is your favourite spread in the book and why?

Mick: Probably the Beowulf spread as it was a favourite childhood story - and still is. I like the fact that Grendel is made up in part with pages of the book and his arm is being wrenched off.

Brita: I like the brothers Grimm walking through a forest of their books being stalked by a witch!

Q5. What's your favourite fact or piece of information in the book?

Mick & Brita: That books are precious jewels and their appreciation should be supported at ground level starting with our local public lending libraries.