

Helen Cowcher

FAQs – General

Do you love being an author?

YES! I love being an author, I love painting and I like finding out facts about our world especially to do with nature and thinking about how I can do an exciting book about it.

Why did you decide to be an author?

I decided to become an author so that I could make a new type of picture book. I write words in order to paint the pictures that I want to do. That means that I choose the words very carefully, with some images that I want to include in the story, already in my mind.

How long does it take you to write a book?

It takes a LONG time as I find it very difficult. It can take many weeks. I write slightly different versions, on and off, until I am happy with the final version. I have an editor, a bit like your teacher, who points out where I could make things clearer. The way I work is: I write MUCH more than I need to, then cross out a lot to make the story shorter. This is very important for a picture book where the pictures must 'tell a lot of the story'.

How do you get your ideas?

As I love real places, wildlife and environment it is going to be an idea connected to that theme...but even then there is so much choice. So many exciting and important things to tell a story about!

The hardest part is to come up with an idea that is right. I don't really know how I get my ideas but if an idea comes along that I think is good, I pay attention to it and note it down. It is easy to daydream when travelling... and often when I'm not thinking but daydreaming an idea comes to me.

Were you good at art at school?

Yes I was good but not spectacular. It didn't all come easily to me but I had an inspiring teacher so I always found that I wanted to work at art. I loved drawing and using color and drew a lot at home.... whatever stayed still long enough!

Were you always a writer?

No I have always been an artist, but not always a writer. I studied English language & literature for 2 years when I was 16 years old. I had grown up with a father who used poetic language which I took totally for granted. For several years, when I was at art college, I hardly wrote. I started to write my own stories so that I could do picture books for children about real places and about subjects important to me. Wildlife and the environment and people and how they are all interconnected, are my favourite themes.

What advice can you give to young artists and authors?

No to worry about making mistakes. I scrap lots of my writing and erase lots of my drawing! It helps to write about something you know about or love doing. And to paint something you like to imagine or see in front of you. It could be anything. It might be an idea you got from a book! Think hard about what you are doing then it will turn out better and try coming to the subject from different angles or viewpoints.

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