



The Children's Bookshop Muswell Hill

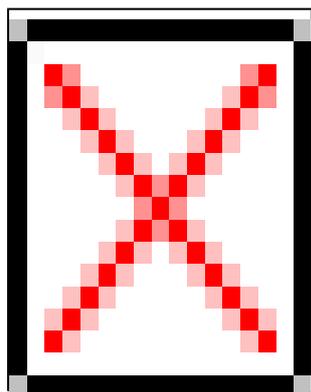
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BfK's Brilliant Children's BookshopsThe Children's Bookshop, Muswell Hill, London.



At only 600 square foot The Children's Bookshop, Muswell Hill, operates from a very small space and no customer can be unaware of the constant stream of recommendations going on. Each member of staff has their own personal favourites and with a stockholding of 13,000 titles there is plenty to choose from. Owner **Kate Agnew** explains.

?My book's got a dog with sunglasses in??

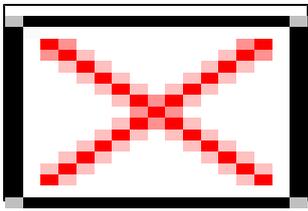
?So? Mine's got monsters like Skyrim.?

?Yeah, but I bet even if yours had got a dog in, it wouldn't be wearing sunglasses!?

Heated discussions about the relative merits of one book versus another are nothing unusual in a bookshop filled with and staffed by passionate readers, but this particular conversation was taking place between two Year 9 boys who had been brought to the bookshop, together with 28 of their contemporaries, because they were avowed non-readers. Some enthusiastic chat, lots of personalized recommendations and half an hour's browsing later, and a group of them were busily arguing over *Spy Dogs* versus *Fighting Fantasy*. The remainder were already deep into their new books ? **Spud** and **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian** having proved particular favourites.

It was an encounter that highlighted the value of individual attention, time spent listening as well as suggesting, of encouraging children to think of themselves as readers. The following week we had a group of primary children brought in by their teacher because their homes couldn't offer such outings. We shared with them some much-loved favourites that no child should be without including Oliver Jeffers' picture books, dual language editions of **The Very Hungry Caterpillar** and **Handa's Surprise**, and Michael Rosen's **Quick! Let's Get Out of Here**. That same week I spent a very different, but equally fulfilling day at a private school recommending books to girls already so well read that I had to ask publishers for early release of several titles. We are privileged to serve such a diverse audience, united by the pleasure we can all share in a good read.

A thriving, book-loving local community



There are some questions we get asked regularly. Maybe it's picture books for younger siblings for whom we might suggest **Oh No, George!**, **Ella Bella Ballerina and Swan Lake**, or **Scruffy Bear and the Six White Mice**; new(ish) additions to our repertoire of picture books for older readers are **The Viewer** and **A Bus Called Heaven**; for 'instead of Jacqueline Wilson' requests we might produce **Saffy's Angel**, **The Penderwicks**, or, more recently, **Olivia's First Term** - while gently indicating that perhaps Hetty Feather might be worth a look if children are desperate but parents anxious.... When asked for 'things to read after **The Hunger Games**', we favour Marie Lu's **Legend**, or perhaps **The Declaration**, and our Saturday girl smoothly takes fans onwards to **Lord of the Flies**, to the delight of their parents. Our Years 5-7 book club has just loved **Sky Hawk** and their infectious enthusiasm has confirmed this as a staple 'after Morpurgo' recommendation.

Alongside our loyal core of local customers, we have many who come from further afield, sometimes with very specific needs that require our specialist help. They might be educational practitioners in search of books for conferences (outdoor play, non-phonics readers, good books for childminders) and training sessions (visual literacy, SEAL, implementing a creative curriculum) or looking for titles to support a particular lesson or topic (pirate stories with flashbacks for Year 6?). Increasingly customers, hard pressed teachers especially, look to us to make selections for them, often spending substantial budgets on their behalf. This is a task which requires particular care, whether it's keeping a tactful eye on books for looked-after children to avoid a surfeit of happy families, taking pains with a school library pick not to duplicate anything this year they had last, or levelling books to be used as group readers ('Is this a 2A reader for inner-city children who've never encountered farm machinery?!?').

A list of our recent bestsellers inevitably reflects the titles we all love, with Siobhan Dowd's **The London Eye Mystery** and Eva Ibbotson's **One Dog and His Boy** featuring highly. It bears testimony too to the success and popularity of the many authors we've held events with over the past few weeks: Lauren St John's new hardback is at number 3, her bestselling Blue Peter winner at number 4. **The Highway Rat** at number 2 is a tribute to Axel Scheffler's superb talk at a local primary while the presence of several Kevin Crossley-Holland titles is a reminder of how engaging he was as writer-in-residence at another school. It's particularly lovely to see two Muswell Hill authors featuring in the top 10: Helen Peters, whose debut novel **The Secret Hen House Theatre** is a delight; and Sita Brahmachari whose recent, inspirational local launch for **Jasmine Skies** featured Indian dancing on the streets of Muswell Hill!

The bestseller list, with its blend of local and national, well-established favourites and exciting new features, is perhaps not unlike the Children's Bookshop itself. All we need now is a dog with sunglasses?

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